CHRISTINE
AND
OTHER POEMS

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CHRISTINE

A TROUBADOUR'S SONG

AND OTHER POEMS

By George Henry Miles

Said the Rose, and Other Lyrics
Christine, and Other Poems
Mohammed
Essay on Hamlet
Loretto; or, The Choice. A Novel
The Truce of God. A Novel
The Governess. A Novel

LE CHÂTEAU DE MIOLANS

CHRISTINE

A TROUBADOUR'S SONG

THE SLEEP OF MARY

AMIN

BY

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PREFACE

IN the first of the poems printed in this volume the writer has undertaken to give an example of that reversion from the modern to the mediæval spirit, which, in England and Germany where it most flourished, is called the Romantic School. Its aim was to reopen and revive the choked-up springs of the naïve, simple poetry of the middle ages, the chansons of knight-errantry, and the feudal mode of thought. It includes many well-known writers, — Uhland, Schiller, Scott, Coleridge, and others whose works are still popular, — and its influence is not yet departed.

In Christine this influence is shown by the nature of the incidents, the character of the versification and imagery, and a faint tinge of symbolism, with a touch of miracle and the supernatural belonging to the days of the troubadours, the crusaders, and the Ages of Faith.

The laying of the scene of the poem in what is now French Savoy arose out of a romantic coincidence of the poet's early career. In his student days at Mount St. Mary's there was hung, in the President's room, an old French painting of a feudal castle bearing the title, "Le Château de Miolans." This picture possessed a wonderful charm for the youthful poet, who, like most young American students of that day, was a great reader of chivalric romances by Scott and others, but had little hope of ever visiting a *real* château. Nevertheless it so happened, several years after leaving his Alma Mater, that while journeying from Spain through Savoy on his way into Italy, the route brought him directly to the original of this vision of his youth, whose location he had never known.

Beyond Chambéry the road follows the valley of the Isère upward and eastward toward Mt. Blanc, until, after passing St. Pierre d'Albigny, it reaches the spot where the Arc joins the Isère, and then turns sharp to southeast up the valley of the Arc and over the Mt. Cenis pass

into Italy. Just at this point, "where the Arc and the Isère murmuring meet," in one of the world's magnificent situations, stands the superb old castle of Miolans. Sheltered from the north winds by the peaks behind it, and overlooking, from its precipice on the south, the beautiful valley and plain of Savoy, five hundred feet below; with views from its terraces and towers over the encircling panorama, to Mt. Blanc and Mt. Cenis, it is one of the lovely places of the earth.

Miles was struck with its wonderful position and carefully marked the spot with its beauties and character as they are partially described in the poem. Here was "a local habitation and a name" for a gallant knight! A worthy home for the hero of his new work, a tale of chivalry to be called Christine, which he had been for some time meditating. The journey up from Grenoble, and by the Grande Chartreuse to Chambéry, had supplied him with the local colour, but the main inspiration of all — save the heroine, his own ideal — had begun and ended with the grand old castle of Miolans.

In the second poem, "The Sleep of Mary," Miles has rendered into vivid and touching verse a legend of Jerusalem concerning the Assumption of the blessed Virgin Mary, and won thereby the prize which had been offered for the best poem founded on this event.

The Assumption itself — that is, the passing of Mary from earth to Heaven with only a short sleep in the tomb, but without the death of the body — is a well-known belief of the Roman Catholic world. It has been made, by some of the greatest painters, the subject of many beautiful pictures, of which those by Titian, Murillo, and Leonardo da Vinci are perhaps the most esteemed and celebrated.

To these great paintings the present author may be said to have added another valuable picture of a different kind, a literary one. In the human interest imparted to the narrative by the introduction of the heroic Jewish High Priest, and by the glowing descriptions of the natural and supernatural events portrayed, there is impressed upon the "mind's eye" of the reader

a touching and realistic vision of the scenes and the meaning of the poem.

"Amin," the third and last of the poems, has its scene laid in Egypt during the times immediately following the Moslem conquest. In the valley of the "Sacred Nile" the whole action of the poem takes place; the first canto being occupied with the descent of the river, the second with certain events at Cairo.

In its composition the poem is somewhat unequal, yet it is always graphic and interesting. In very many places the poetry is extremely melodious and beautiful, rising at times to heights of remarkable vigor and eloquence; showing also keen insight and thoughtful suggestion, especially in the fine apostrophes to the ancient monuments. In other parts we find the expression of youthful exuberance and enthusiasm with a lack of careful structure and finish in the verse. This may perhaps be condoned when we find that the date on the MSS. shows it to have been written in the author's twenty-fourth year. As the work of an American poet at that early age,

and in view of the fine quality of the greater part of the verse, notably in the magnificent tributes to the grandeur of Ancient Egypt, it seems worthy of a place with the author's maturer works.

F. B. M.

Christine

PRELUDE

THERE is an Angel whom I see
in dreams.
The heavens break open and he
takes his stand
Upon a cliff of shining adamant
Far in the furthest west. There bird-like
poised,
With wings of snow wide arched and
radiant head
For flight thrown forward, to his lips he
lifts
A shining trumpet, gold, and like to those
Seen by Angelico in blessed vision;
Then slowly with unmoving pinion soars
Straight for the zenith. Not a star is
shining,

Nor sun, nor moon, nor round his tranquil brow
The halo, nor the fire-trail at his feet.
The firmament is lighted from his eyes;
And all is still in ocean, air, and earth,
Save the far music which that trumpet makes.

There is a word in that far music couched,
Half lost and hidden in its melody:
Beauty or Duty which, or both in one?
For half the puzzled echoes answer "Beauty,"
While half are still replying "Duty, Duty."
But once the zenith reached, the Seraph swings
One shining hand aloft in central heaven
And stamps in fire, with letters interlaced
In lustrous coils inseparably blent,
Two mystic words. And as he writes, and ere

The deep sky hides him in her heart, the last
Low echoes of that golden clarion sigh,
"Beauty and Duty, one eternally,"

Ladye, to thee the minstrel's song is sung.

CHRISTINE

THE Queèn hath built her a fairy Bower
In the shadow of the Accursed Tower,
For the Moslem hath left his blood-stained lair,
And the banner of England waveth there.
Thither she lureth the Lion King
To hear a wandering Trovère sing;
For well she knew the Joyous Art
Was surest path to Richard's heart.
But the Monarch's glance was on the sea —
Sooth, he was scarce in minstrel mood,
For Philip's triremes homeward stood
With all the Gallic chivalry.
And as he watched the filmy sail
Upon the farthest billow fail,
He muttered, " Richard ill can spare

Thee and thy Templars, false and fair;
Yet God hath willed it — home to thee,
Death or Jerusalem for me!"
Then pressing with a knightly kiss
The peerless hand that slept in his,
"Ah, would our own Blondel were here
To try a measure I wove last e'en.
What songster hast thou caught, my Queen,
Whose harp may soothe a Monarch's ear?"
She beckoned, and the Trovère bowed
To many a Lord and Ladye fair
That gathered round the royal pair;
But most his simple song was vowed
To a sweet shape with dark brown hair,
Half hidden in the gentle crowd;
Pale as a spirit, sharply slender,
In maiden beauty's crescent splendor.
And never yet bent Minstrel knee
To Mistress lovelier than she.

The First Song

THE FIRST SONG

I

YE have heard of the Castle of Miolan
And how it hath stood since time began,
Midway to yonder mountain's brow,
Guarding the beautiful valley below:
Its crest the clouds, its ancient feet
Where the Arc and the Isère murmuring meet.
Earth hath few lovelier scenes to show
Than Miolan with its hundred halls,
Its massive towers and bannered walls,
Looming out through the vines and walnut woods
That gladden its stately solitudes.
And there might ye hear but yestermorn
The loud halloo and the hunter's horn,

The laugh of mailèd men at play,
The drinking bout and the roundelay.
But now all is sternest silence there,
Save the bell that calls to vesper prayer;
Save the ceaseless surge of a father's wail,
And, hark! ye may hear the Baron's Tale.

II

"Come hither, Hermit! — Yestermorn
I had an only son,
A gallant fair as e'er was born,
A knight whose spurs were won
In the red tide by Godfrey's side
At Ascalon.

"But yestermorn he came to me
For blessing on his lance,
And death and danger seemed to flee
The joyaunce of his glance,
For he would ride to win his Bride,
Christine of France.

" All sparkling in the sun he stood
In mail of Milan dressed,
A scarf, the gift of her he wooed,
Lay lightly o'er his breast,
As, with a clang, to horse he sprang
With nodding crest.

" Gaily he quaffed the stirrup cup
Afoam with spicy ale,
But as he gave the goblet up
Methought his cheek grew pale,
And a shudder ran through the iron man
And through his mail.

" Oft had I seen him breast the shock
Of squire or crownèd king,
His front was firm as rooted rock
When spears were shivering:
I knew no blow could shake him so
From living thing.

" 'T was something near akin to death
That blanched and froze his cheek,
Yet 't was not death for he had breath,
And when I bade him speak,
Unto his breast his hand he pressed
With one wild shriek.

" The hand thus clasped upon his heart
So sharply curbed the rein,
Grey Caliph, rearing with a start,
Went bounding o'er the plain
Away, away, with echoing neigh
And streaming mane.

" After him sped the menial throng;
I stirred not in my fear;
Perchance I swooned, for it seemed not long
Ere the race did reappear,
And my son still led on his desert-bred,
Grasping his spear.

" Unchanged in look or limb, he came,
He and his barb so fleet,
His hand still on his heart, the same
Stern bearing in his seat,
And wheeling round with sudden bound
Stopped at my feet.

" And soon as ceased that wildering tramp
'What ails thee, boy?' I cried —
Taking his hand all chill and damp —
'What means this fearful ride?
Alight, alight, for lips so white
Would scare a Bride!'

" But sternly to his steed clove he,
And answer made he none,
I clasped him by his barbèd knee
And there I made my moan;
While icily he stared at me,
At me alone.

" A strange, unmeaning stare was that,
And a page beside me said,
'If ever a corse in saddle sat,
Our lord is certes sped!'
But I smote the lad, for it drove me mad
To think him dead.

" What! dead so young, what! lost so soon,
My beautiful, my brave!
Sooner the sun should find at noon
In central heaven a grave!
Sweet Jesu, no, it is not so
When Thou canst save!

" For was he dead and was he sped,
When he could ride so well,
So bravely bear his plumèd head?
Or, was 't some spirit fell
In baneful wrath had crossed his path
With fiendish spell?

" Oh, Hermit, 't was a cruel sight,
And He who loves to bless,
Ne'er sent on son such bitter blight,
On sire such sore distress,
Such piteous pass, and I, alas,
So powerless !

" They would have ta'en him from his horse
The while I wept and prayed,
They would have laid him like a corse
Upon a litter made
Of traversed spear and martial gear,
But I forbade.

" I gazed into his face again,
I chafed his hand once more,
I summoned him to speak, in vain —
He sat there as before,
While the gallant Grey in dumb dismay
His rider bore.

" Full well, full well Grey Caliph then
The horror seemed to know,
E'en deeper than my mailèd men
Methought he felt our woe;
For the barbèd head of the desert-bred
Was drooping low.

" Amazed, aghast, he gazed at me,
That mourner true and good,
Then backward at my boy looked he,
As if a word he sued,
And like sculptured pile in abbey aisle
The twain there stood.

" I took the rein: the frozen one
Still fast in saddle sate,
And tremblingly I led him on
Toward the great castle gate.
O walls mine own, why have ye grown
So desolate? —

" I led them to the castle gate
And paused before the shrine
Where throned in state from earliest date,
Protectress of our line,
Madonna pressed close to her breast
The Babe Divine.

" And kneeling lowly at her feet,
I begged the Mother mild
That she would sue her Jesu sweet
To aid my stricken child;
And the meek stone face was full of grace
As if she smiled.

" And methought the eyes of the Full of Grace
Upon my darling shone,
Till living seemed that marble face
And the living man seemed stone,
While a halo played round the Mother Maid
And round her Son.

" And there was radiance everywhere
Surpassing light of day,
On man and horse, on shield and spear
Burned the bright, blinding ray;
But most it shone on my only one
And his gallant Grey.

" A sudden clang of armor rang,
My boy lay on the sward,
Up high in air Grey Caliph sprang,
An instant fiercely pawed,
Then trembling stood aghast and viewed
His fallen lord.

" Then with the flash of fire away
Like sunbeam o'er the plain,
Away, away, with echoing neigh
And wildly waving mane,
Away he sped, loose from his head
The aimless rein.

" I watched the steed from pass to pass
Unto the welkin's rim,
I feared to turn my eyes, alas,
To trust a look at him;
And when I turned, my temples burned
And all grew dim.

" Sweet if such swoon could endless be,
Yet speedily I woke
And missed my boy: they showed him me
Full length on bed of oak,
Clad as 't was meet in mail complete
And sable cloak.

" All of our race upon that bier
Had rested one by one,
I had seen my father lying there,
And now, — there lay my son!
And my sick soul bled the while it said —
'Thy will be done!'

" Bright glanced the crest, bright gleamed the spur,
That well had played their part,
His lance still clasped, nor could they stir
His left hand from his heart;
There fast it clove, nor would it move
With all their art.

" I found no voice, I shed no tear,
They thought me well resigned.
All else who stood around the bier
With weeping much were blind;
And a mourning voice went through the house
Like a low wind.

" And there was sob of aged man
And woman's wailing cry,
All cheeks were wan, all eyes o'erran,
Yon fair-haired maidens sigh,
And one apart with breaking heart
Weeps silently.

" But sharper than spear-thrust, I trow,
Their wailing through me went;
Stern silence suited best my woe,
And, howe'er well they meant,
The menial din seemed half akin
To merriment.

" For oh, such grief was mock to mine
Whose days were all undone,
The last of all this ancient line
To share whose grief was none!
Straight from the hall I barred them all
And stood alone.

" ' Receive me now, thou bed of oak!'
I fell upon the bier,
And, Hermit, when this morning broke
It found me clinging there.
O woeful morn! That day should dawn
On such a pair!

" I sent for thee, thou man of God,
To watch with me to-night;
My boy still liveth, by the rood,
Nor shall be funeral rite! —
But, Hermit, come: this is the room:
There lies the Knight!"

III

But she apart
With breaking heart? —
That very yestermorn she stood
In the deepest shade of the walnut wood,
As the Knight rode by on his raven steed,
Crying, " Daughter mine, hast thou done the deed?
I gave thee the venom, I gave thee the spell,
A jealous heart might use them well."
But she waved her white arms and only said,
" On oaken bier is Miolan laid!"
" Dead!" laughed the Knight. " Then round Pilate's Peak
Let the red light burn and the eagle shriek.

" When Miolan's heir lies on the bier,
Low is the only lance I fear:
I ride, I ride to win my Bride,
Ho, Eblis, to thy servant's side,
Thou hast sworn no foe
Shall lay me low
Till the dead in arms against me ride ! "

The Second Song

THE SECOND SONG

I

THEY passed into an ancient hall
With oaken arches spanned.
Full many a shield hung on the wall,
Full many a broken brand,
And barbèd spear and scimitar
From Holy Land.

And scarfs of dames of high degree
With gold and jewels rich,
And many a mouldered effigy
In many a mouldering niche,
Like grey sea shells whose crumbling cells
Bestrew the beach.

The sacred dead possessed the place,
  The silent cobweb wreathed
The tombs where slept that warrior race,
  With swords for ever sheathed:
You seemed to share the very air
    Which they had breathed.

Oh, darksome was that funeral room,
  With oaken arches dim,
The torchlight, struggling through the gloom,
  Fell faint on effige grim,
On dragon dread and carvèd head
    Of Cherubim.

Of Cherubim fast by a shrine
  Whereon the last sad rite
Was wont for all that ancient line,
  For dame and belted knight —
A shrine of Moan which death alone
    Did ever light.

But light not now that altar stone
  While hope of life remain,
Though darksome be that altar lone,
  Unlit that funeral fane,
Save by the rays cast by the blaze
    Of torches twain.

Of torches twain at head and heel
  Of him who seemeth dead,
Who sleepeth so well in his coat of steel,
  His cloak around him spread —
The young Knight fair, who lieth there
    On oaken bed.

One hand still fastened at his heart,
  The other on his lance,
While through his eyelids, half apart,
  Life seemeth half to glance.
"Sweet youth awake, for Jesu's sake,
    From this strange trance!"

But heed or answer there is none.
Then knelt that Hermit old;
To Mother Mary and her Son
Full many a prayer he told,
Whose wondrous words the Church records
In lettered gold

And many a precious litany
And many a pious vow,
Then rising said, "If fiend it be,
That fiend shall leave thee now!"
And traced the sign of the Cross divine
On lips and brow.

As well expect yon cherub's wings
To wave at matin bell!
Not all the relics of the kings
Could break that iron spell.
"Pray for the dead, let mass be said,
Toll forth the knell!"

"Not yet!" The Baron gasped and sank
As if beneath a blow,
With lips all writhing as they drank
The dregs of deepest woe;
With eyes aglare, and scattered hair
Tossed to and fro.

So swings the leaf that lingers last
When wintry tempests sweep,
So reels, when storms have stripped the mast, —
The galley on the deep,
So nods the snow on Eigher's brow
Before the leap.

Uncertain 'mid his tangled hair
His palsied fingers stray,
He smileth in his dumb despair
Like a sick child at play,
Though wet, I trow, with tears eno'
That beard so grey.

Oh, Hermit, lift him to your breast,
There best his heart may bleed;
Since none but Heaven can give him rest,
Heaven's priest must meet his need:
Dry that white beard, now wet and weird
As pale sea-weed.

Uprising slowly from the ground,
With short and frequent breath,
In aimless circles, round and round,
The Baron tottereth
With trailing feet, a mourner meet
For house of death.

Till, pausing by the shrine of Moan,
He said, the while he wept,
"Here, Hermit, here mine only one,
When all the castle slept,
As maiden knight, o'er armor bright,
His first watch kept.

"This is the casque that first he wore,
And this his virgin shield,
This lance to his first tilt he bore,
With this first took the field —
How light, how lâche to that huge ash
He now doth wield!

"This blade hath levelled at a blow
The she-wolf in her den,
With this red falchion he laid low
The slippery Saracen.
God! will that hand, so near his brand,
Ne'er strike again?

"Frown not on him, ye men of old,
Whose glorious race is run;
Frown not on him, my fathers bold,
Though many the field ye won:
His name and los may mate with yours
Though but begun!

"Receive him, ye departed brave,
Unlock the gates of light,
And range yourselves about his grave
To hail a brother knight
Who never erred in deed or word
Against the right!

"But is he dead and is he sped
Withouten scathe or scar?
Why, Hermit, he hath often bled
From sword and scimitar —
I've seen him ride, wounds gaping wide,
From war to war.

"And hath a silent, viewless thing
Laid danger's darling low,
When youth and hope were on the wing
And life in morning glow?
Not yonder worm in winter's storm
Perisheth so!

" Oh, Hermit, thou hast heard, I ween,
Of trances long and deep,
But, Hermit, hast thou ever seen
That grim and stony sleep,
And canst thou tell how long a spell
Such slumbers keep?

"Oh, be there naught to break the charm,
To thaw this icy chain;
Has Mother Church no word to warm
These freezing lips again;
Be holy prayer and balsams rare
Alike in vain? . . . .

" A curse on thy ill-omened head;
Man, bid me not despair;
Churl, say not that a Knight is dead
When he can couch his spear;
When he can ride — Monk, thou hast lied.
He lives, I swear!

"Up from that bier! Boy, to thy feet!
Know'st not thy father's voice?
Thou ne'er hast disobeyed . . . is 't meet
A sire should summon thrice?
By these grey hairs, by these salt tears,
Awake, arise!

"Ho, lover, to thy ladye flee,
Dig deep the crimson spur;
Sleep not 'twixt this lean monk and me
When thou shouldst kneel to her!
Oh 't is a sin, Christine to win,
And thou not stir!

"Ho, laggard, hear yon trumpet's note
Go sounding to the skies,
The lists are set, the banners float,
Yon loud-mouthed herald cries,
'Ride, gallant knights, Christine invites,
Herself the prize!'

"Ho, craven, shun'st thou the melée,
When she expects thy brand
To prove to-day in fair tourney
A title to her hand?
Up, dullard base, or by the mass
I 'll make thee stand!" . . . .

Thrice strove he then to wrench apart
Those fingers from the spear,
Thrice strove to sever from the heart
The hand that rested there.
Thrice strove in vain with frantic strain
That shook the bier.

Thrice with the dead the living strove,
Their armor rang a peal,
The sleeping knight he would not move
Although the sire did reel:
That stately corse defied all force,
Stubborn as steel.

" Ay, dead, dead, dead ! " the Baron cried ;
" Dear Hermit, I did rave.
O were we sleeping side by side ! . . . .
Good monk, I penance crave
For all I said. . . . Ay, he is dead,
Pray heaven to save !

" Betake thee to thy crucifix,
And let me while I may,
Rain kisses on these frozen cheeks
Before they know decay.
Leave me to weep and watch and keep
The worm at bay.

" Thou wilt not spare thy prayers, I trust ;
But name not now the grave —
I 'll watch him to the very dust ! . . . .
So, Hermit, to thy cave,
Whilst here I cling lest creeping thing
Insult the brave ! "

Why starts the Hermit to his feet,
  Why springs he to the bier,
Why calleth he on Jesu sweet,
  Staying the starting tear,
What whispereth he half trustfully
    And half in fear?

"Sir Knight, thy ring hath razed his flesh —
  'T was in thy frenzy done;
Lo, from his wrist how fast and fresh
  The blood-drops trickling run;
Heaven yet may wake, for Mary's sake,
    Thy warrior son.

"Heap ashes on thy head, Sir Knight,
  In sackcloth gird thee well,
The shrine of Moan must blaze in light,
  The morning mass must swell;
Arouse from sleep the castle keep,
    Sound every bell!"

They come, pale maid and mailèd man
They throng into the hall,
The watcher from the barbican,
The warder from the wall,
And she apart, with breaking heart,
The last of all.

"*Introibo! Introibo!*"
The morning mass begins;
"*Mea culpa! mea culpa!*"
Forgive us all our sins;
And the rapt Hermit chaunts with streaming eyes,
That seem to enter Paradise,
"*Gloria! Gloria!*"
The shrine of Moan had never known
That gladdest of all hymns.

II

The fair-haired maiden standeth apart
In the chapel gloom, with breaking heart.

But a smile crept over her face as she said,
"The draught was well measured I ween;
He liveth, thank Allah, but not to wed
His beautiful Christine.
No lance hath Miolan couched to-day:
Let the bride for the bridegroom watch and pray,
Till the lists shall hear the shriek
Of the Dauphin's daughter borne away
By the Knight of Pilate's Peak."

The Third Song

THE THIRD SONG

I

FRONTING the vine-clad Hermitage, —
Its hoary turrets mossed with age,
Its walls with flowers and grass o'er-
grown, —
A ruined Castle, throned so high
Its battlements invade the sky,
Looks down upon the rushing Rhone.
From its tall summits you may see
The sunward slopes of Côte Rotie
With its red harvest's revelry;
While eastward, midway to the Alpine snows,
Soar the sad cloisters of the Grande Chart-
reuse.
And here, 't is said, to hide his shame,
The thrice accursed Pilate came;

And here the very rock is shown,
Where, racked and riven with remorse,
Mad with the memory of the Cross,
He sprang and perished in the Rhone.
'T is said that certain of his race
Made this tall peak their dwelling place,
And built them there this castle keep
To mark the spot of Pilate's leap.
Full many the tale of terror told
At eve, with changing cheek,
By maiden fair and stripling bold,
Of these dark keepers of the height
And, most of all, of the Wizard Knight,
The Knight of Pilate's Peak.
His was a name of terror known
And feared through all Provence;
Men breathed it in an undertone,
With quailing eye askance,
Till the good Dauphin of Vienne,
And Miolan's ancient Lord,
One midnight stormed the robber den
And gave them to the sword;

All save the Wizard Knight, who rose
In a flame-wreath from his dazzled foes;
All save a child, with golden hair,
Whom the Lord of Miolan deigned to spare
  In ruth to womanhood,
And she, alas, is the maiden fair
  Who wept in the walnut wood.

But who is he, with step of fate,
Goes gloomily through the castle gate
  In the morning's virgin prime?
Why scattereth he with frenzied hand
The fierce flame of that burning brand,
  Chaunting an ancient rhyme?
The eagle, scared from her blazing nest,
Whirls with a scream round his sable crest.
What muttereth he with demon smile,
Shaking his mailèd hand the while
  Toward the Chateau of La Sône,
Where champing steed and bannered tent
Gave token of goodly tournament,
  And the Golden Dolphin shone?

"Woe to the last of the Dauphin's line,
When the eagle shrieks and the red lights shine
Round the towers of Pilate's Peak!
Burn, beacon, burn!" — and as he spoke
From the ruined towers curled the pillared smoke,
As the light flame leapt from the ancient oak
And answered the eagle's shriek.
Man and horse down the hillside sprang
And a voice through the startled forest rang —
"I ride, I ride to win my bride.
Ho, Eblis! to thy servant's side;
Thou hast sworn no foe
Shall lay me low
Till the dead in arms against me ride."

II

Deliciously, deliciously
Cometh the dancing dawn,
Christine, Christine comes with it,
Leading in the morn.
Beautiful pair!

So cometh the fawn
Before the deer.
Christine is in her bower
Beside the swift Isère
Weaving a white flower
With her dark brown hair.
Never, O never,
Wandering river,
Though flowing for ever,
E'er shalt thou mirror
Maiden so fair!

Hail to thee, hail to thee,
Beautiful one;
Maiden to match thee,
On earth there is none.
And there is none to tell
How beautiful thou art;
Though oft the first Rudel
Has made the Princes start,
When he has strung his harp and sung
The Lily of Provence,

Till the high halls have rung
With clash of lifted lance
Vowed to the young
Christine of France.

Ah, true that he might paint
The blooming of thy cheek,
The blue vein's tender streak
On marble temple faint;
Lips in whose repose
Ruby weddeth rose,
Lips that parting show
Ambushed pearl below:
Or he may catch the subtle glow
Of smiles most wildly sweet,
May whisper of the drifted snow
Where throat and bosom meet,
And of the dark brown braids that flow
So grandly down to thy feet.
Ah, true that he may sing
Thy wondrous mien,

Stately as befits a queen,
Yet light and lithe and all awing
  As becometh Queen of air
Who glideth unstepping everywhere.
And he might number e'en
  The charms that haunt thy drapery —
Charms that, ever changing, cluster
Round thy milk-white mantle's lustre, —
  Maiden mantle that is part of thee,
  Milk-white mantle that doth circle thee
    With the snows of virgin grace;
Halo-like around thee wreathing,
Spirit-like about thee breathing
    The glory of thy face.

But those dark eyes, Christine?
  Peace, poet, peace,
  Cease, minstrel, cease!
But those dear eyes, Christine?
  Mute, O mute
  Be voice and lute!

O dear dark eyes that seem to dwell
With holiest things invisible,
  Who may read your oracle?
Earnest eyes that ever rove
  Empyrean heights above,
Yet aglow with mortal love,
  Who may speak your spell?
Dear dark eyes that beam and bless,
In whose luminous caress
Nature weareth bridal dress, —
Eyes of tranquil Prophetess,
  Your meaning who may tell!
    O there is none!
  Peace, poet, peace,
  Cease, minstrel, cease,
    For there is none!
O eyes of fire without desire,
  O stars that lead the sun!
    But minstrel cease,
    Peace, poet, peace,
  Tame Troubadour be still;
      Voice and lute

Alike be mute,
It passeth all your skill!

Sooth thou art fair,
O ladye dear,
Yet one may see
The shadow of the east in thee;
Tinting to a riper flush
The faint vermillion of thy blush;
Deepening in thy dark brown hair
Till sunshine sleeps in starlight there.

Ten years ago, 't is said,
The Dauphin of Vienne —
Long after all had deemed him dead —
Returned from Palestine.
Slowly up to his castle gate
Rode he, alone and desolate;
For all his Warrior men,
His pilgrim bands with their burnished brands
Were sepulchred in drifting sands; —

And he so changed, withal,
By battle and sun and storm,
That the hoary headed Seneschal
Who tottered to the outer wall
Knowing his master's trumpet call,
Knew not his master's form.
A lonely castle was it then,
For, the twin boys he had left at play
Now silent 'neath the chapel lay,
And the pale lady of Vienne —
Too long, too sorely tried —
Shrieked when she saw her lord again,
Sprang to his breast . . . . and died!

But ere the Dauphin's tears were dried
There came a stranger child
Who sported daily at his side
With joyous grace and laughter mild.
And she would sit upon his knee
And combat his great agony
With her sweet smile and girlish glee.

And she would warble oft,
In accents strange yet soft,
Of roses wondrous fair that bloom
In Sharon ; — of the long sunset
That gilds lamenting Olivet ; —
Of Eglantines that grace the gloom
Of sad Gethsemane ;
And of the young Knight they had seen,
Of evening walks along the green
That borders Siloë.
Thus ran her song, 'till he would say —
Putting her upreached arms away —
Alas, Christine !

. . . . .

Whoe'er her sire, whate'er her race,
The Dauphin loved her as his own,
And the rare beauty of her face
Made such amends for rank unknown
That, when she had to woman grown, —
The ancient Dauphin's only heir,
Young, beautiful beyond compare,
The fairest flower of France, —

Knights by sea and Knights by land
Came to win the fair white hand,
With sigh and suppliant lance;
And many a shield
Displayed afield
The Lily of Provence.

Ladye love of prince and bard
Yet to one young Savoyard
Swerveless faith she gave —
To the young Knight they had seen
When moonlight silvered o'er the green
That fringes Siloë's wave.
And he, blest boy, where lingers he?
For the Dauphin hath given slow consent
That, after a joyous tournament,
The stately spousals shall be.

Christine is in her bower
That blooms by the swift Isère,
Twining a white flower
With her dark brown hair.

The skies of Provence
Are bright with her glance,
And nature's matin organ floods
The world with music from the myriad throats
Of the winged Troubadours, whose heaven-ward notes
Blend with the rolling Anthem of the woods.

With melody, flowers, and light
Hath the maiden come to play,
As fragile, fair, and bright
And lovelier than they?
O no, she has come to her bower
That blooms by the dark Isère
For the bridegroom who named the first hour
Of daylight to meet her there:
But the bridal morn on the hills is born
And the bridegroom is not here.

Hie thee hither, Savoyard,
On such an errand youth rides hard.

Never knight so dutiful
Failed a maid so beautiful:
And she in such sweet need,
And he so bold and true!—
She will watch by the long green avenue
Till it quakes to the tramp of his steed;
Till it echoes the neigh of the gallant Grey
Spurred to the top of his speed.

In the long, green, leafy avenue
The Ladye her love-watch keepeth,
Listening so close that she can hear
The very dripping of the dew
Stirred by the worm as it creepeth;
Straining her ear
For her lover's coming
Till his steed sounds near
In the bee's far humming.
She stands in the lonely avenue,
Her back to a cypress tree;
O Savoyard once bold and true,
Late bridegroom, where canst thou be?

Hark! o'er the bridge that spans the river
There cometh a clattering tread,
Never was shaft from mortal quiver
Half so swiftly sped.
Onward the sound,
Bound after bound,
Leapeth along the tremulous ground.

Through the nodding forest darting,
Leaves, like water, round them parting,
Down the dark green avenue,
Horse and horseman burst in view.
Marry, what ails the bridegroom gay
That he strideth a coal black steed,
Why cometh he not on the gallant Grey
That never yet failed him at need?
Gone is the white plume, that clouded his crest
And the love-scarf that lightly lay over his breast;
Dark is his shield as the raven's wing
To the funeral banquet hurrying.
Came ever knight in such sad array

On the merry morn of his bridal day ?
The Ladye trembles, and well she may ;
Saints, you would think him a fiend astray.
A plunge, a pause, and, fast beside her,
Stand the sable horse and rider.
Alas, Christine, this shape of wrath
In Palestine once crossed thy path ;
His arm around thy waist, I trow,
To bear thee to his saddle-bow,
But the Savoyard was there,
In time to save, tho' not to smite,
For the demon fled into the night
From Miolan's matchless heir.
Alas, Christine, that lance lies low —
Lies low on oaken bier !

Down bent the Wizard, till his plume
O'ershadowed her like falling doom :
She feels the cold casque touch her ear,
She hears the whisper, hollow, clear, —
" From Acre's strand, from Holy Land,
O'er mountain crag, through desert sand,

By land, by sea, I come for thee,
And mine ere sunset shalt thou be!
Dost know me, girl?"
The visor raises —
God, 't is the Knight of Pilate's Peak!
As if in wildered dream she gazes,
Gazing as one who strives to shriek.
She cannot fly, or speak, or stir,
For that face of horror glares at her
Like a phantom fresh from hell.
She gave no answer, she made no moan;
Mute as a statue overthrown,
Her fair face cold as carvèd stone,
Swooning the maiden fell.

The sun has climbed the golden hills
And danceth down with the mountain rills.
Over the meadow the swift beams run
Lifting the flowers, one by one,
Sipping their chalices dry as they pass,
And kissing the beads from the bending grass.
The Dauphin's chateau, grand and grey,

Glows merrily in the risen day;
The castle that seemeth ancient as earth,
Lights up like an old man in his mirth.
Through the forest old, the sunbeams bold
  Their glittering revel keep,
Till, in arrowy gold, on the chequered wold
  In glancing lines they sleep.
And one sweet beam hath found its way
To the violet bank where the Ladye lay.
O radiant touch! perchance so shone
The hand that woke the widow's son.

She sighs, she stirs; the death-swoon breaks;
  Life slowly fires those pallid lips;
And feebly, painfully, she wakes,
  Struggling through that dark eclipse.
Breathing fresh of Alpine snows,
Breathing sweets of summer rose,
Murmuring songs of soft repose,
The south wind on her bosom blows:
But she heeds it not, she hears it not;
  Fast she sits with steady stare,

The dewdrops heavy on her hair,
Her fingers clasped in dumb despair,
Frozen to the spot:
While o'er her fierce and fixed as fate,
The fiend on his spectral war-horse sate.
A horrible smile through the visor broke,
And, quoth he,
"I but watched till my Ladye woke.
Get thee a flagon of Shiraz wine,
For the lips must be red that answer mine!"
Cleaving the woods, like the wind he went,
His face o'er his shoulder backward bent,
Crying thrice — "We shall meet at the tournament!"
Clasping the cypress overhead,
Christine rose from her fragrant bed,
And a prayer to Mother Mary sped.
Hold not those gleaming skies for her
The same unfailing Comforter?
And those two white winged cherubim,
She once had seen, when Christmas hymn
Chimed with the midnight mass,

Scattering light through the chapel dim,
  Alive in the stainèd glass —
What fiend could harm a hair of her,
While those arching wings took care of her?
And our Ladye, Maid divine,
Mother round whose marble shrine
She wreathed the rose of Palestine
  So many sinless years,
Will not heaven's maiden-mother Queen
  Regard her daughter's tears?
Yes! — through the forest stepping slow,
Tranquil mistress of her woe,
  Goeth the calm Christine;
And but for yonder spot of snow
Upon each temple, none may know
  How stern a storm hath been.
For never dawned a brighter day,
And the Ladye smileth on her way,
Greeting the blue-eyed morn at play
With earth in her spangled green.
    A single cloud
    Stole like a shroud

Forth from the fading mists that hid
The crest of each Alpine pyramid;
Unmovingly it lingers over
The mountain castle of her lover;
  While over Pilate's Peak
Hangs the grey pall of the sullen smoke,
Leaps the lithe flame of the ancient oak
  And the eagle soars with a shriek.
Full well she knew the curse was near,
But that heart of hers had done with fear.
By St. Antoine, not steadier stands
  Mont Blanc's white head in winter's whirl
  Than that calm, fearless, smiling girl
With brow upturned and firmly folded hands.

Back to her bower so fair
  Christine her way is wending;
Over the dark Isère
  Silently she's bending,
Thus communing with the stream,
As one who whispers in a dream:
"Waters that at sunset ran

Round the Mount of Miolan;
Stream, that binds my love to me,
Whisper where that lover be;
Wavelets mine, what evil things
Mingle with your murmurings;
Tell me, ere ye glide away,
Wherefore doth the bridegroom stay?
Hath the fiend of Pilate's Peak
Met him, stayed him, slain him?— speak!
Speak the worst a Bride may know,
God hath armed my soul for woe;
Touching heaven, the virgin snow
Is firmer than the rock below.
Lies my love upon his bier,
Answer, answer, dark Isère!
Hark, to the low voice of the river
Singing '*Thy love is lost for ever!*'
Weep with all thy icy fountains,
Weep, ye cold, uncaring mountains,
I have not a tear!
Stream, that parts my love from me,
Bear this bridal rose with thee;

Bear it to the happy hearted,
Christine and all the flowers have parted!"

They are coming from the castle,
A bevy of bright-eyed girls,
Some with their long locks braided,
Some with loose golden curls.
Merrily 'mid the meadows
They win their wilful way;
Winding through sun and shadow,
Rivulets at play.
Brows with white rosebuds blowing,
Necks with white pearl entwined,
Gowns whose white folds imprison
Wafts of the wandering wind.
The boughs of the charmèd woodland
Sing to the vision sweet,
The daisies that crouch in the clover
Nod to their twinkling feet.
They see Christine by the river,
And, deeming the bridegroom near,
They wave her a dewy rose-wreath

Fresh plucked for her dark brown hair.
Hand in hand tripping to meet her,
Birdlike they carol their joy,
Wedding soft Provençal numbers
To a dulcet old strain of Savoy.

THE GREETING

Sister, standing at Love's golden gate,
Life's second door —
Fleet the maidentime is flying,
Friendship fast in love is dying,
Bridal fate doth separate
Friends evermore.

Pilgrim seeking with thy sandalled feet
The land of bliss;
Sire and sister tearless leaving,
To thy heckoning palmer cleaving —
Truant sweet, once more repeat
Our parting kiss.

Wanderer filling for enchanted isle
Thy dimpling sail;
Whither drifted, all uncaring,
So with faithful helmsman faring,
Stay and smile with us, awhile,
Before the gale.

Playmate, hark! a thousand thronging hours
Old secrets tell:
Glade and thicket, hill and heather,
Whisper sacredly together;
Queen of ours, the very flowers
Sigh forth farewell.

Christine looked up, and smiling stood
Among the choral sisterhood:
But some who sprang to greet her, stayed
Tiptoe, with the speech unsaid;
And, each the other, none knew why,
Questioned with quick, wondering eye.
One by one, their smiles have flown,
No lip is laughing but her own;

And hers, the frozen smile that wears
The glittering of unshed tears.
"Ye have sung for me, I will sing for ye,
My sisters fond and fair."
And she bent her head till the chaplet fell
Adown in the deep Isère.

THE REPLY

Bring me no rose-wreath now:
But come when sunset's first tears fall,
When night-birds from the mountain call—
Then bind my brow.

Roses and lilies white—
But tarry till the glow-worms trail
Their gold-work o'er the spangled veil
Of falling night.

Twine not your garland fair
Till I have fallen fast asleep;
Then to my silent pillow creep
And leave it there—

There in the chapel yard! —
Come with twilight's earliest hush,
Just as day's last purple flush
Forsakes the sward.

Stop where the white cross stands.
You 'll find me in my wedding suit,
Lying motionless and mute,
With folded hands.

Tenderly to my side:
The bridegroom's form you may not see
In the dim eve, but he will be
Fast by his bride.

Soft with your chaplet move,
And lightly lay it on my head:
Be sure you wake not with rude tread
My jealous love.

Kiss me, then quick away;
And leave us, in unwatched repose,
With the lily and the rose
Waiting for day!

But hark! the cry of the clamorous horn
Smites the bright stillness of the morn.
From moated wall, from festal hall
The banners beckon, the bugles call;
Already flames, in the lists unrolled
O'er the Dauphin's tent, the Dolphin gold.
A hundred knights in armor glancing,
Hurry afield with pennons dancing,
Each with a vow to splinter a lance
For Christine, the Lily of Provence.
"Haste!" cried Christine;
"Sisters, we tarry late,
Let not the tourney wait
For its Queen!"
And, toward the castle gate,
They take their silent way along the green.

The Fourth Song

THE FOURTH SONG

I

AMID the gleam of princely war
Christine sat like the evening star,
Pale in the sunset's pageant bright,
A separate and sadder light.
O bitter task
To rear aloft that shining head,
While round thee, cruel whisperers ask —
"Marry, what aileth the Bridegroom gay?
The heralds have waited as long as they may,
Yet never a sign of the gallant Grey.
Is Miolan false or dead?"

II

The Dauphin eyed Christine askance:
"We have tarried too long," quoth he;
"Doth the Savoyard fear the thrust of France?
By the Bride of Heaven, no laggard lance
Shall ever have guard of thee!"

You could see the depths of the dark eyes shine
And a glow on the marble cheek,
As she whispered, " Woe to the Dauphin's line
When the eagle shrieks and the red lights shine
Round the towers of Pilate's Peak."

She levelled her white hand toward the west,
Where the omen beacon shone;
And he saw the flame on the castle crest,
And a livid glare light the mountain's breast
Even down to the rushing Rhone.

Never braver lord in all the land
Than that Dauphin true and tried;
But the rein half fell from his palsied hand
And his fingers worked at the jewelled brand
That shook in its sheath at his side.

For it came with a curse from earliest time,
It was carved on his father's halls,
It had haunted him ever from clime to clime,
And at last the red light of the ancient rhyme
Is burning on Pilate's walls!

Yet warrior-like beneath his feet
Trampling the sudden fear,
He cried, "Let thy lover's foot be fleet —
If thy Savoyard would wed thee, sweet,
By Saint Mark, he were better here!

"For I know by yon light there is danger near,
And I swear by the Holy Shrine,
Be it virgin spear or Miolan's heir,
The victor to-day shall win and wear
This menaced daughter of mine!"

The lists are aflame with the gold and steel
Of knights in their proud array,
And gong and tymbalon chiming peal
As forward the glittering squadrons wheel
To the jubilant courser's neigh.

The Dauphin sprang to the maiden's side,
And thrice aloud cried he,
"Ride, gallants all, for beauty ride,
Christine herself is the victor's bride,
Whoever the victor be!"

And thrice the heralds cried it aloud,
While a wondering whisper ran
From the central lists to the circling crowd,
For all knew the virgin hand was vowed
To the heir of Miolan.

Quick at the Dauphin's plighted word
Full many an eye flashed fire,
Full many a knight took a truer sword,
Tried buckle and girth, and many a lord
Chose a stouter lance from his squire.

Back to the barrier's measured bound
Each gallant speedeth away;
Then, forward fast to the trumpet's sound,
A hundred horsemen shake the ground
And meet in the mad melée.

Crimson the spur and crimson the spear,
The blood of the brave flows fast;
But Christine is deaf to the dying prayer,
Blind to the dying eyes that glare
On her as they look their last.

She sees but a Black Knight striking so well
That the bravest shun his path;
His name or his nation none may tell,
But wherever he struck a victim fell
At the feet of that shape of wrath.

"'Fore God," quoth the Dauphin, "that unknown sword
Is making a merry day!"
But where, oh, where is the Savoyard,
For low in the slime of that trampled sward
Lie the flower of the Dauphinée!

And the victor stranger rideth alone,
Wiping his bloody blade;
And now that to meet him there is none,
Now that the warrior work is done,
He moveth toward the maid.

Sternly, as if he came to kill,
Toward the damsel he turneth his rein;
His trumpet sounding a challenge shrill,
While the fatal lists of La Sône are still
As he paces the purple plain.

A hollow voice through the visor cried,
"Mount to the crupper with me.
Mount, Ladye, mount to thy master's side,
For 't is said and 't is sworn thou shalt be the Bride
Of the victor, whoever he be."

At the sound of that voice a sudden flame
Shot out from the Dauphin's eyes,
And he said, "Sir Knight, ere we grant thy claim,
Let us see the face, let us hear the name,
Of the gallant who winneth the prize."

"'T is a name you know and a face you fear,"
The Wizard Knight began;
"Or hast thou forgotten that midnight drear,
When my sleeping fathers felt the spear
Of Vienne and Miolan?

"Ay, quiver and quail in thy coat of mail,
For hark to the eagle's shriek;
See the red light burns for the coming bale!"
And all knew as he lifted his aventayle
The Knight of Pilate's Peak.

From the heart of the mass rose a cry of wrath
As they sprang at the shape abhorred,
But he swept the foremost from his path,
And the rest fell back from the fatal swath
Of that darkly dripping sword.

But uprose the Dauphin brave and bold,
And strode out upon the green,
And quoth he, "Foul fiend, if my purpose hold,
By my halidome, tho' I be passing old,
We 'll splinter a lance for Christine.

"Since her lovers are low or recréant,
Her champion shall be her sire;
So get a fresh lance from yonder tent,
For though my vigor be something spent
I fear neither thee nor thy fire!"

Swift to the stirrup the Dauphin sprang,
The bravest and best of his race:
No bugle blast for the combat rang;
Save the clattering hoof and the armor clang,
All was still as each rode to his place.

With the crash of an April avalanche
They meet in that merciless tilt;
Back went each steed with shivering haunch,
Back to the croup bent each rider staunch,
Shivered each spear to the hilt.

Thrice flies the Baron's battle-ax round
The Wizard's sable crest;
But the coal-black steed, with a sudden bound,
Hurled the Crusader to the ground,
And stamped on his mailèd breast.

Thrice by the vengeful war-horse spurned,
Lowly the Dauphin lies;
While the Black Knight laughed as again he turned
Toward the lost Christine, and his visor burned
As he gazed at his beautiful prize.

Her doom you might read in that gloating stare,
But no fear in the maid can you see;
Nor is it the calm of a dumb despair,
For hope sits aglow on her forehead fair,
And she murmurs, "At last — it is he!"

Proudly the maiden hath sprung from her seat,
Proudly she glanceth around,
One hand on her bosom to stay its beat,
For hark! there 's a sound like the flying feet
Of a courser, bound after bound.

Clearing the lists with a leopard-like spring,
Plunging at top of his speed,
Swift o'er the ground as a bird on the wing,
There bursts, all afoam, through the wondering ring,
A gallant but riderless steed.

Arrow-like straight to the maiden he sped,
With a long, loud, tremulous neigh,
The rein flying loose round his glorious head,
While all whisper again, "Is the Savoyard dead?"
As they gaze at the riderless Grey.

One sharp, swift pang thro' the virgin heart,
One wildering cry of woe,
Then fleeter than dove to her calling nest,
Lighter than chamois to Malaval's crest
She leaps to the saddle bow.

"Away!" He knew the sweet voice; away,
With never a look behind;
Away, away, with echoing neigh
And streaming mane, goes the gallant Grey,
Like an eagle before the wind.

They have cleared the lists, they have passed her bower,
And still they are thundering on;
They are over the bridge — another hour,
A league behind them the Leaning Tower
And the spires of Saint Antoine.

Away, away, in their wild career
Past the slopes of Mont Surjeu;
Thrice have they swam the swift Isère,
And firm and clear in the purple air
Soars the Grand Som full in view.

Rough is their path and sternly steep,
Yet halting never a whit,
Onward the terrible pace they keep,
While the good Grey, breathing free and deep,
Steadily strains at the bit.

They have left the lands where the tall hemp
springs,
Where the clover bends to the bee;
They have left the hills where the red vine flings
Her clustered curls of a thousand rings
Round the arms of the mulberry tree.

They have left the lands where the walnut lines
The roads, and the chestnuts blow;
Beneath them the thread of the cataract shines,
Around them the plumes of the warrior pines,
Above them the rock and the snow.

Thick on his shoulders the foam flakes lay,
And the big drops roll from his chest,
Yet on, ever on, goes the gallant Grey,
Bearing the maiden as smoothly as spray
Asleep on the ocean's breast.

Onward and upward, bound after bound,
By Bruno's Bridge he goes;
And now they are treading holy ground,
For the feet of her flying Caliph sound
By the cells of the Grand Chartreuse.

Around them the darkling cloisters frown,
The sun in the valley hath sunk;
When right in her path, lo! the long white gown,
The withered face and the shaven crown
And the shrivelled hand of a monk.

A light like a glittering halo played
Round the brow of the holy man;
With lifted finger her course he stayed,
"All is not well," the pale lips said,
"With the heir of Miolan.

"But in Chambery hangs a relic rare
Over the altar stone:
Take it, and speed to thy Bridegroom's bier;
If the Sacristan question who sent thee there,
Say, 'Bruno, the Monk of Cologne.'"

She bent to the mane while the cross he signed
Thrice o'er the suppliant head:
"Away with thee, child!" and away like the wind
She went, with a startled glance behind,
For she heard an ominous tread.

The moon is up, 't is a glorious night,
They are leaving the rock and the snow,
Mont Blanc is before her, phantom white,
While the swift Isère, with its line of light,
Cleaves the heart of the valley below.

But hark to the challenge, "Who rideth alone?" —
"O warder, bid me not wait! —
My lover lies dead and the Dauphin o'erthrown —
A message I bear from the Monk of Cologne" —
And she swept thro' Chambery's gate.

The Sacristan kneeleth in midnight prayer
By Chambery's altar stone.
"What meaneth this haste, my daughter fair?"
She stooped and murmured in his ear
The name of the Monk of Cologne.

Slowly he took from its jewelled case
A kerchief that sparkled like snow,
And the Minster shone like a lighted vase
As the deacon unveiled the gleaming face
Of the Santo Sudario.

A prayer, a tear, and to saddle she springs,
Clasping the relic bright;
Away, away, for the fell hoof rings
Down the hillside behind her — God give her wings!
The fiend and his horse are in sight.

On, on, the gorge of the Doriat's won,
She is nearing her Savoyard's home,
By the grand old road where the warrior son
Of Hanno swept with his legions dun,
On his mission of hatred to Rome.

The ancient oaks seem to rock and reel
As the forest rushes by her,
But nearer cometh the clash of steel,
And nearer falleth the fatal heel,
With its flickering trail of fire.

Then first the brave young heart grew sick
'Neath its load of love and fear,
For the Grey is breathing faint and quick,
And his nostrils burn and the drops fall thick
From the point of each drooping ear.

His glorious neck hath lost its pride,
  His back fails beneath her weight,
While steadily gaining, stride by stride,
The Black Knight thunders to her side —
  Heaven, must she meet her fate?

She shook the loose rein o'er the trembling head,
  She laid her soft hand on his mane,
She called him her Caliph, her desert-bred,
She named the sweet springs where the palm trees
    spread
  Their arms o'er the burning plain.

But the Grey looked back and sadly scanned
  The maid with his earnest eyes —
A moment more and her cheek is fanned
By the black steed's breath, and the demon hand
  Stretches out for the virgin prize.

But she calls on Christ, and the kerchief white
  Waves full in the face of her foe:
Back with an oath reeled the Wizard Knight
As his steed crouched low in the wondrous light
  Of the Santo Sudario.

Blinded they halt while the maiden flies,
The murmuring Arc she can hear,
And, lo ! like a cloud on the shining skies,
Atop of yon perilous precipice,
The castle of Miolan's Heir.

" Fail not, my steed ! " — Round her Caliph's head
The relic shines like the sun :
Leap after leap up the curving steep,
He speeds to his master's castle keep,
And his glorious race is won.

" Ho, warder ! " — At sight of the gallant Grey
The drawbridge thundering falls :
Wide goes the gate at that jubilant neigh,
And, glory to God for his mercy to-day,
She is safe within Miolan's walls.

The Fifth Song

THE FIFTH SONG

I

IN the dim grey dawn by Miolan's gate
The fiend on his wizard war-horse sate.
The fair-haired maid at his trumpet call
Creeps weeping and wan to the outer wall:
"My curse on thy venom, my curse on thy spell,
They have slain the master I loved too well.
Thou saidst he should wake when the joust was o'er,
But oh, he never will waken more!"
She tore her fair hair, while the demon laughed,
Saying, "Sound was the sleep that thy lover quaffed;
But bid the warder unbar the gate,
That the lost Christine may meet her fate."

II

" Hither, hither, thou mailèd man
With those woman's tears in thine eyes,
With thy brawny cheek all wet and wan,
Show me the heir of Miolan,
Lead where my Bridegroom lies."

They led her on with a sullen tread,
That fell like a muffled groan,
Through halls as silent as the dead,
'Neath long grey arches overhead,
Till they came to the shrine of Moan.

What greets her there by the torches' glare?
In vain hath the mass been said!
Low bends the sire in mute despair,
Low kneels the Hermit in silent prayer,
Between them the mighty dead.

No tear she shed, no word she spoke,
But gliding up to the bier,
She took her stand by the bed of oak
Where her Savoyard lay in his sable cloak,
His hand still fast on his spear.

She bent her burning cheek to his,
And rested it there awhile,
Then touched his lips with a lingering kiss,
And whispered him thrice, "My love, arise,
I have come for thee many a mile!"

The man of God and the ancient Knight
Arose in tremulous awe;
She was so beautiful, so bright,
So spirit-like in her bridal white,
It seemed in the dim funereal light
'T was an angel that they saw.

"Thro' forest fell, o'er mount and dell,
Like the falcon, hither I 've flown,
For I knew that a fiend was loose from hell,
And I bear a token to break this spell
From Bruno, the Monk of Cologne.

"Dost thou know it, love? when fire and sword
Flamed round the Holy Shrine,
It was won by thee from the Paynim horde,
It was brought by thee to Bruno's guard,
A guerdon from Palestine.

"Wake, wake, my love! In the name of Grace,
That hath known our uttermost woe,
Lo! this thorn-crowned brow on thine I place!"
And, once more revealed, shone the wondrous face
Of the Santo Sudario.

At once over all that ancient hall
There went a luminous beam;
Heaven's deepest radiance seemed to fall,
The helmets shone on the shining wall,
And the faded banners gleam.

And the chime of hidden cymbals rings
To the song of a cherub choir;
Each altar angel waves his wings,
And the flame of each altar taper springs
Aloft in a luminous spire.

And over the face of the youth there broke
A smile both stern and sweet;
Slowly he turned on the bed of oak,
And proudly folding his sable cloak
Around him, sprang to his feet.

Back shrank the sire, half terrified,
Both he and the Hermit, I ween;
But she — she is fast to her Savoyard's side,
A poet's dream, a warrior's bride,
His beautiful Christine.

Her hair's dark tangles all astray
Adown her back and breast;
The print of the rein on her hand still lay,
The foam-flakes of the gallant Grey
Scarce dry on her heaving breast.

She told the dark tale and how she spurred
From the Knight of Pilate's Peak;
You scarce would think the Bridegroom heard,
Save that the mighty lance-head stirred,
Save for the flush in his cheek;

Save that his gauntlet clasped her hair —
And oh, the look that swept
Between them! — all the radiant air
Grew holier — it was like a prayer —
And they who saw it wept.

The lights on the altar brighter grew
In the gleam of that heavenly gaze;
The cherub music fell soft as dew,
The breath of the censer seemed sweeter too,
The torches mellowed their requiem hue,
And burnt with a bridal blaze.

And the Baron clasps his son with a cry
Of joy as his sorrows cease:
While the Hermit, wrapt in his Rosary,
Feels that the world beneath the sky
Hath yet its planet of peace.

But hark! by the drawbridge, shrill and clear,
A trumpet's challenge rude;
The heart of Christine grew faint with fear,
But the Savoyard shook his mighty spear,
And the blood in his forehead stood.

"Beware, beware, 't is the Fiend!" quoth she:
"Whither now?" asks the ancient Knight,

"What meanest thou, boy? — Leave the
knave to me:
Wizard, or fiend, or whatever he be,
By the bones of my fathers, he shall flee
Or ne'er look on morning light.

"What, thou just risen from the grave,
Atilt with an armèd man?
Dost dream that youth alone is brave,
Dost deem these sinews too old to save
The honor of Miolan?"

But the youth he answered with gentlest tone,
"I know thee a warrior staunch,
But this meeting is meant for me alone.
Unhand me, my lord, have I woman grown?
Wouldst stop the rushing of the Rhone,
Or stay the avalanche?"

He broke from his sire as breaks the flash
From the soul of the circling storm:
You could hear the grasp of his gauntlet crash
On his quivering lance and the armor clash
Round that tall young warrior form.

"Be this thy shield?" the maiden cried,
Her hand on the kerchief of snow;
"If forth to the combat thou wilt ride,
Face to face be the Fiend defied
With the Santo Sudario!"

But the young Knight laid the relic rare
On the ancient altar-stone;
"Holy weapons to men of prayer,
Lance in rest and falchion bare
Must answer for Miolan's son."

Again the challenger's trumpet pealed
From the barbican, shrill and clear;
And the Savoyard reared his dinted shield
Its motto, gold on an azure field —
"ALLES ZU GOTT UND IHR."

To horse! — From the hills the dawning day
Looks down on the sleeping plain;
In the court-yard waiteth the gallant Grey,
And the castle rings with a joyous neigh
As the Knight and his steed meet again.

And the coal-black charger answers him
From the space beyond the gate,
From the level space, where dark and dim
In the morning mists, like giant grim,
The Fiend on his war-horse sate.

Oh, the men at arms how they stared aghast
When the Heir of Miolan leapt
To saddle-bow sounding his bugle-blast;
How the startled warder breathless gasped,
How the hoary old seneschal wept!

And the fair-haired maid with a sob hath sprung
To the lifted bridle rein;
Fast to his knee her white arms clung,
While the waving gold of her fair hair hung
Mixed with Grey Caliph's mane.

"O Miolan's heir, O master mine,
O more than heaven adored,
Live to forget this slave of thine,
Wed the dark-eyed Maid of Palestine,
But dare not yon demon sword!"

But the Baron thundered, "Off with the slave!"
And they tore the white arms away,
"A woman 's a curse in the path of the brave;
Level thy lance and upon the knave,
For he laughs at this fool delay!

"But pledge me first in this beaker bright
Of foaming Cyprian wine;
Thou hast fasted, God wot, like an anchorite,
Thy cheeks and brow are a trifle white,
But, 'fore heaven, thou'lt bear thee in this fight
As beseemeth son of mine!"

The youth drank deep of the burning juice
Of the mighty Marètel,
Then, waving his hand to his Ladye thrice,
Swifter than snow from the precipice,
Spurred full on the infidel.

"O Bridegroom bold, beware my brand!"
The Knight of Pilate cries,
"For 't is written in blood by Eblis' hand,
No mortal might may mine withstand
Till the dead in arms arise."

" The dead are up, and in arms arrayed,
They have come at the call of fate:
Two days, two nights, as thou know'st, I 've laid
On oaken bier " — and again there played
That halo light round the Mother Maid
In the niche by the castle gate.

Each warrior reared his shining targe,
Each plumèd helmet bent,
Each lance thrown forward for the charge,
Each steed reined back to the very marge
Of the mountain's sheer descent.

The rock beneath them seemed to groan
And shudder as they met;
Away the splintered lance is thrown,
Each falchion in the morning shone,
One blade uncrimsoned yet.

But the blood must flow and that blade must glow
E'er their deadly work be done;
Steel rang to steel, blow answered blow,
From dappled dawn till the Alpine snow
Grew red in the risen sun.

The Bridegroom's sword left a lurid trail,
So fiercely and fleetly it flew;
It rang like the rattling of the hail,
And wherever it fell the sable mail
Was wet with a ghastly dew.

The Baron, watching with stern delight,
Felt the heart in his bosom swell;
And quoth he, By the mass, a gallant sight!
These old eyes have gazed on many a fight,
But, boy, as I live, never saw I knight
Who did his devoir so well!"

And oh, the flush o'er his face that broke,
The joy of his shining eyes,
When, backward beaten, stroke by stroke,
The Wizard reeled, like a falling oak,
Toward the edge of the precipice.

On the trembling verge of that perilous steep
The demon stood at bay,
Calling with challenge stern and deep,
That startled the inmost castle keep,

"Daughter of mine, here 's a dainty leap
We must take together to-day.

"Come, maiden, come!" Swift circling round,
Like bird in the serpent's gaze,
She sprang to his side with a sudden bound,
While the black steed trampled the flinty ground
To fire, his nostrils ablaze.

"Farewell!" went the fair-haired maiden's cry,
Shrilling from hill to hill;
"Farewell, farewell, it was I, 't was I,
Who sinned in a jealous agony,
But I loved thee too well to kill!"

High reared the steed with the hapless pair,
A plunge, a pause, a shriek,
A black plume loose in the middle air,
A foaming plash in the dark Isère, —
Thus vanished for ever the maiden fair
And the Knight of Pilate's Peak.

A mighty cheer shook the ancient hall,
A white hand waved in the sun,
The vassals all on the outer wall
Clashed their arms at the brave old Baron's call,
"To my arms, mine only one!"

But oh, what aileth the gallant Grey,
Why droopeth the barbèd head?
Slowly he turned from that fell tourney
And proudly breathing a long, last neigh,
At the castle gate fell dead.

III

Lost to all else, forgotten e'en
The dark eyes of his dear Christine,
His fleet foot from the stirrup freed,
The Knight knelt by his fallen steed.
Awhile with tone and touch of love
To cheer him to his feet he strove:
Awhile he shook the bridle-rein —
That glazing eye! — alas, in vain.

Bareheaded on that fatal field,
His gauntlet ringing on his shield,
His voice a torrent deep and strong,
The warrior's soul broke forth in song.

THE KNIGHT'S SONG

And art thou, *art* thou dead? —
Thou with front that might defy
The gathered thunders of the sky,
Thou before whose fearless eye
All death and danger fled!

My Khalif, hast thou sped
Homeward where the palm-trees' feet
Bathe in hidden fountains sweet,
Where first we met as lovers meet,
My own, my desert-bred!

Thy back has been my home;
And, bending o'er thy flying neck,
Its white mane waving without speck,
I seemed to tread the galley's deck,
And cleave the ocean's foam.

Since first I felt thy heart
Proudly surging 'neath my knee,
As earthquakes heave beneath the sea,
Brothers in the field were we;
And must we, *can* we part?

To match thee there was none!
The wind was laggard to thy speed:
O God, there is no deeper need
Than warrior's parted from his steed
When years have made them one.

And shall I never more
Answer thy laugh amid the clash
Of battle, see thee meet the flash
Of spears with the proud, pauseless dash
Of billows on the shore?

And all our victor war,
And all the honors men call mine,
Were thine, thou voiceless warrior, thine;
My task was but to touch the rein —
There needed nothing more.

Worst danger had no sting
For thee, and coward peace no charm;
Amid red havoc's worst alarm
Thy swoop as firm as through the storm
The eagle's iron wing.

O more than man to me!
Thy neigh outsoared the trumpet's tone,
Thy back was better than a throne,
There was no human thing save one
I loved as well as thee!

O Knighthood's truest friend!
Brave heart by every danger tried,
Proud crest by conquest glorified,
Swift saviour of my menaced Bride,
Is this, is *this* the end? —

Thrice honored be thy grave!
Wherever knightly deed is sung,
Wherever minstrel harp is strung,
There too thy praise shall sound among
The beauteous and the brave.

And thou shalt slumber deep
Beneath our chapel's cypress sheen;
And there thy lord and his Christine
Full oft shall watch at morn and e'en
Around their Khalif's sleep.

There shalt thou wait for me
Until the funeral bell shall ring,
Until the funeral censor swing,
For I would ride to meet my King,
My stainless steed, with thee!

The song has ceased, and not an eye
'Mid all those mailèd men is dry;
The brave old Baron turns aside
To crush the tear he cannot hide.
With stately step the Bridegroom went
To where, upon the battlement,
Christine herself, all weeping, leant.

Well might that crested warrior kneel
At such a shrine, well might he feel
As if the angel in her eyes
Gave all that hallows Paradise.

And when her white hands' tender spell
Upon his trembling shoulder fell,
Upward one reverent glance he cast,
Then, rising, murmured, "Mine at last!"

"Yes, thine at last!" Still stained with blood,
The Dauphin's self beside them stood.
"Fast as mortal steed could flee,
My own Christine, I followed thee.
Saint George, but 'twas a gallant sight
That miscreant hurled from yonder height:
Brave boy, that single sword of thine,
Methinks, might hold all Palestine.
But see, from out the shrine of Moan
Cometh the good Monk of Cologne,

"Bearing the relic rare that woke
Our warrior from his bed of oak.
See him pass with folded hands
To where the shaded chapel stands.
The Bridegroom well hath won the prize,
There stands the priest, and there the altar lies."

IV

When the moon rose o'er lordly Miolan
That night, she wondered at those ancient walls:
Bright tapers flashing from a hundred halls
Lit all the mountain — liveried vassals ran
Trailing from bower to bower the wine-cup, wreathed
With festal roses — viewless music breathed
A minstrel melody, that fell as falls
The dew, less heard than felt; and maidens laughed,
Aiming their curls at swarthy men who quaffed
Brimmed beakers to the newly wed: while some
Old henchmen, lolling on the court-yard green
Over their squandered Cyprus, vowed between
Their cups, "there was no pair in Christendom
To match their Savoyard and his Christine?"

The Trovère ceased: none praised the lay, —
Each waited to hear what the King would say.
But the grand blue eye was on the wave,
Little recked he of the tuneful stave:
He was watching a bark just anchored fast
With England's banner at her mast,
And quoth he to the Queen, "By my halidome,
I wager our Bard Blondel hath come!"
E'en as he spoke, a joyous cry
From the beach proclaimed the Master nigh;
But the merry cheer rose merrier yet
When the Monarch and his Minstrel met,
The Prince of song and Plantagenet.
"A song!" cried the King. "Thou art just in time
To rid our ears of a vagrant's rhyme:
Prove how that recreant voice of thine
Hath thriven at Cyprus, bard of mine!"
The Minstrel played with his golden wrest,
And began the "*Fytte of the Bloody Vest.*"

The vanquished Trovère stole away
Unmarked by lord or ladye gay:

Perchance one quick, kind glance he caught,
Perchance that glance was all he sought.
For when Blondel would pause to tune
His harp and supplicate the moon,
It seemed as tho' the laughing sea
Caught up the vagrant's melody;
And far along the listening shore,
Till every wave the burthen bore,
In long, low echoes might you hear —
"*Alles, Alles zu Gott und Ihr!*"

The Sleep of Mary

A Legend of Jerusalem

THE SLEEP OF MARY

IN the great, guilty City still she dwelt;
And daily, thrice from Calvary to the Tomb,
Thence back to Sion, to her home with John,
Passed spirit-like, unquestioned and unseen,
Save when her presence, at her pleasure, flashed
Upon some startled Roman, as amazed
He asked, "What Sybil walks Jerusalem?"
Save when the faithful, answering to her smile,
Murmured "Hail, Mother of the Crucified!"

On the great, guilty City looked the home
Of John at Sion, — looked upon the Temple
Where *He* had taught, — upon the streets that knew
His miracles, — upon the hill whose crest
Still in her dreams was crowned with crosses Three:
For earth to Her was but a mirror graved
With Crosses Three.

One evening, as it chanced,
She sat alone, — afar at Ephesus,
The loved Disciple. Overhead, the stars
Like angels beckoned her ; the very heavens
Grew nearer, and the lustrous Syrian moon
Flooded her roof with glory : not a flower
But gave its soul to her : no night-bird's song
But that some Cherub echoed it : her heart
Lost in deep, plenteous peace, wherein regret
Was stilled in joy as memory, false for once
To grief, and true alone to gladness, painted
The story of her life in light alone
Undimmed by shadow.

She remembered only
The Angel's greeting and the Ghostly kiss
Wherein the creature and Creator met,
And meeting, mingled for eternity :
Remembered only how the Cherubs sang
Around the New-Born, how the Wise Men
brought
Their tributes, how the radiant water ran
In wine to please her. She remembered only

Virgin delight, maternal ecstasy
With unrecorded blisses of her youth,
So vividly that from her features fell
The mask of years as, with her soul, her flesh
Grew young again.

Fair as when God's swift herald
Cried "*Full of Grace!*" — she sat, as o'er her swept
The same mysterious joy and maiden fear
That erst preceded that supreme Announcement;
And awe unmeasured filled her, for she knew
That only twice such rapture cometh — once
With life, and once with death.

And lo, a light,
That cast no shadow, round about her shone, —
The light once seen before, the bridal torch
Of Nazareth! And she bent her head, and wept,
Till with the deepening glow there came the rush

Of wings and fragrance from the Mount of God;
And seeing not, she felt, as once before,
That Gabriel was near her.

"Mary, Hail!
Mother of Him who rescued Israel!"
She knew the voice of music, and her eyes
Opening at last met his. Cradled in light,
A lane of glory from his quivering wings
Back stretching to the skies, before her flashed
The great Archangel! Time had wrought no change
On the sweet face of God's glad messenger,
Save the two lines of anguish on his brow,
Stamped when the Passion gave the Cross to Heaven
As well as earth, a seal supernal, meant
For time and for eternity — All else
The same, he knelt before her, and she gazed
Into his eyes with love celestial lit,
As in the desert thirsting Hagar gazed
Upon the sands to sudden fountains starting
Beneath her feet.

"Behold this branch of Palm
Gathered in Paradise: let it be borne
Before thy bier: thy Son awaits thy coming
And all the angels clamor for their Queen."

Dark grew the lane of glory as he spake
While in its dying splendor paled his smile
As in the morning's mist some setting star;
But in her chamber, every leaf a lamp,
Burned the blest palm of Paradise, diffusing
The light that casts no shadow. And she knew
Her hour had come, and knelt and prayed beside
Her radiant pillow that was all ablaze
Like some vast chrysolite.

And at her prayer,
From the four quarters of the world, at once
Assembled, ghostlike round her stood
The Twelve of Jesus. And she said to them,
"My hour is come!" and gave the palm to John
To bear before her at her burial.

Then shook the house to music as some chapel
Quakes to a choral Anthem: through it swept

Swift gales of fragrance as upon her ear
Smote the remembered voice, " Come, Mother, come !
Complete the bliss of Him who still is Man ! "

Low knelt the Twelve, for they too knew the voice,
Low knelt the Twelve expectant of their Master,
Low knelt the Twelve around the bed of Mary !

Once more the rush of wings and hymns of Joy
From Angels, Prophets, Patriarchs and the choirs
Of Virgins thronging round their mystic Queen.
Then cleaving all that minstrelsy, as cleaves
The seashore's midnight murmur, the pure song
Of April's nightingale serenely throned
High in some overhanging grove, outspoke
The voice of Jesus, " *Come to Lebanon,*
My Mother, my Beloved ! As I speak,
Thy woes, like mine, are past : the rest is peace."

Then Mary answered, "Let thy will be done!"
And instantly, from central heaven, there fell
A meteor through the twilight, deluging
All the great, guilty City in a bath
Of glory: and the home of John on Sion
Seemed burnished silver, as, through Mary's window,
Parting the throng around her, torrent-like
Passed a fierce sea of fire, and Michael, prince
Of Angels, with wide, lambent wings aloft,
And eyes illumined with the warrior joy
Of chosen soldier sent to crown his Queen,
Stretched forth his arms and o'er her bending, caught
Her soul's last mortal sigh, then heavenward sped
Circled by all the Blessed company;
While the great, guilty City witnessing,
Cried "Lo, the wondrous meteor reascends
To central heaven, thrice brighter than it fell."

And so slept Mary.
Three days at her feet

Stood John, the Loved Disciple, statue-like,
Still as an acolyth in marble carved,
The palm-branch sparkling in his lifted hands
Steady as planet in the midnight's hush;
While, round about her gathered, silent knelt
The band of Jesus. Three days rose the sun,
Three nights the moon set, and the Syrian stars
Flashed fire; yet in her chamber light was none,
Save that which, shadowless, from Gabriel's palm
In light divine all other light effaced.

And on the third night, toward Gethsemane,
Bearing a bier, the Twelve of Jesus went
As in a dream — no torch, no taper, save
The radiant palm-branch borne aloft by John,
Who walked before: nor wail, nor measured chant,
Save viewless melodies that murmured round
The silent Twelve.

But the great, guilty City
Seeing — for so it seemed — from Sion's mount
In slow procession all the stars descending,

Summoned her priesthood high, whose Highest, hastening
To know the source of this new mummery,
Sprang toward the shining bier, with hands upraised,
To overturn it, — when, as in the blaze
Of mountain beacon turns the night-bird's wing
To ashes, shrivelled to the shoulder fell
Both impious arms, his palsied mouth aghast,
Muttering "Christ help me!"

"Then, believe in Christ,
And live!" spake Peter, as with added light,
From Sion to Gethsemane, where shone
A new-made vault, swept on the sparkling palm,
The Twelve of Jesus, and the shining bier.

So Mary slept in sad Gethsemane,
The Palm-branch gone, gone too the Twelve of Jesus
Each on his mission vast. But, side by side,
Fast by the sealed vault unmoving knelt,

Weeping till morn, two watchers — Magdalen
The one, a High Priest, in his robes, the other.
Three nights together, side by side they watched
Fast by the sealed vault amid the throng
Of those who came to scoff or came to pray;
But at the third night's final hour, behold,
They found themselves, asudden, throned amid
Silence supreme that smote, as if with death,
The very pulses of the universe;
And sad Gethsemane began to glow
As planets shimmer in the twilight's close,
Brighter and brighter till each eglantine
Blazed like the vanished palm-branch, and once more
Spoke the remembered voice, "*Arise, my Dove, My Undefiled, thou shalt not see corruption!*"

Again the rush of wings, again the Twelve,
Save Thomas, come, as, from the tomb, her soul
In its unspotted tabernacle clad,
On wings of soaring Seraphim upborne
Amid the choral Cherub harmonies,

Her eyes aglow, her robes of virgin snow
Spangled with countless stars, her streaming veil
Back trailing, flame-like, in that flight supreme,
As riseth morning, rose the form of Mary.
And the great, guilty City, trembling felt
That Heaven had taken earth's holiest to itself.

Then in the dying splendor, saw the Twelve, —
For Thomas then was there, — the smitten
High-Priest,
With arms uplifted toward the lane of light
Faint from Gethsemane to Eden reaching, —
His golden robes all dinted with the blows
Rained on him by the rabble, his high brow, —
Three days the Target of Jerusalem, —
Bleeding and scarred with stroke of stave and
stone,
Yet unsubdued, and round it quivering wreathed
A ring of glory.

"Art thou one of us?"
Asked Peter, as upon the nodding brow,
That gave assent, he poured a flow of water

Snatched from an angel's chalice, whispering
Baptismal words.
But doubting Thomas said,
"Unlock the vault where still our mother
sleepeth,
For this is but a vision."
"Sayeth thou so?"
The dying High-Priest answered: "Seest thou
not
How, with her foot upon the crescent moon,
In token of the Truth her girdle falleth?
Open the Vault?"
So saying, passed his soul.

And Thomas wept as midst them fell the
Token,
While Peter, opening the blessed vault, beheld
Roses and lilies only in the tomb
Of Mary.
Then spake Magdalen, "Behold,
He who has watched with me hath need of
rest!"

Erect as one who dies in battle, knelt
The dauntless High-Priest. But they smoothed
his limbs,
And from his lordly forehead washed the
blood,
And, neath the sparkling eglantines, his grave
Delved in the starlight, while around him knelt
The Twelve of God, and Mary Magdalen.

AMIN

A POEM OF EGYPT

AMIN. A POEM OF EGYPT

Canto I

I

THE moon is up in beauty, and her smile
Gilds the broad bosom of the Sacred Nile.
Wake, Egypt! from thy fountain to the sea,
Exulting, greet thy ancient deity.
Alas! — no maiden hands are wreathing now
The crimson rose for passion's glowing brow;
No milk-white arms are waving in the air,
To lure a lover or to speed a prayer;
No timid priestess, exquisitely pale,
Usurps the altar as she lifts her veil;
No fairy shallop cleaves the sparkling stream,
Buoyant with song and radiant with the gleam
Of roving eyes that mock the lamps ashore,
And shame the very moonbeams they adore.

II

The moon is up in beauty — but the sight
Her rays reveal, corrupts their virgin light.
Along the Nile each withered palm tree's head
Droops, as in sorrow, o'er a pile of dead,
And ghastly thousands line the river's brink,
Choking its sacred channel as they drink
And die : — the yacht drifts on with aimless prow,
No matter where — her master lives not now ;
Fast by the helm, he stiffens cold and grim,
The worm is monarch of his boat and him :
Earth has no voice, but when the last, long sigh
Ends — or *begins* — some spirit's agony.
Dire famine, grinning on his lurid throne,
Feasts on the music of a nation's groan.

III

Land of the soul, are not the desert sands
Upon thy temples, and the giant hands
That reared them, dust ? Was not thy glory hurled
With Isis and Osiris from the world ?

Has time not ended anguish, must the curse
Of Heav'n pursue thee to thy regal hearse? —
Or can thy pride, unconquered by decay,
Provoke th' avenging Azraël to lay
His rod upon thy present littleness? —
Hast thou not sucked the marrow of distress
That famine should assail thy little things?
These insects gendered in the tombs of kings, —
Thy children of to-day, who crouch or feel
The subtle argument of Moslem steel!

IV

Along Dendera's portico
No more the Goddess smiles in gladness;
And Memnon's voice is hoarse with woe,
As gazing on the scene below
His face assumes a deeper sadness.
The burning Nile has shrunk away
From giant Luxor's stormy quay;
No more his waters leap to kiss
The columns of Hermopolis,
Or give new life to Philæ's isle,

Green garments to each marble pile
Until her ruins seem to smile
  Forgetful of their fate.
From Ipsambul unto the main,
There 's nothing green on hill or plain,
Foul pestilence and famine reign,
  And all is desolate.
The queen rose dies on her fragrant throne
  In the bowers of El Fayum,
The lotus is only seen in stone
Where softly-treading Horus stands,
With the sacred emblem in his hands,
  Still guarding the temple and tomb.
The tamarisk sighs and the sycamore 's bare,
  And the Eglantine, parched on the mountain
    side,
Swings its white arms in the midnight air
  Like a newly widowed bride.
Despair is in the haunts of love,
The hot wind wails thro' the orange grove ; —
    The harvest is rust,
    The olive dust,

The silken ashour laid low in its pride:
And scarce a grain of gargadan
Remains for camel, goat, or man.

v

Slowly o'er the moonlit stream
Sadly, and silent as a dream,
A light cangiar is flitting;
Her sails are down, her oars are gone,
But the faithful current wafts her on.
On her deck is an old man sitting
Moveless and mute as the pillars of Gow,
While a youth is kneeling before him,
And a maiden bends tenderly o'er him,
With her hand upon his brow.
Their home they had left where Narea's mountains
Are mingling with the sky,
For her hills were bare, and the hundred fountains
That nourished her vales were dry.
They had glided by Meroe's mighty towers,

Syene and the Isle of Flowers.
Far, far behind them lay
Old Ombos with her crumbling walls,
And Edfou's everlasting halls,
And beautiful Esneh,
And Carnac's shafts and Gournou's tombs,
And glittering Siout's snow-white domes,
But they still held on their way.
Nobly had they shared their store
With the patient faithful crew,
Who, one by one,
In the blistering sun
Or the chilly midnight dew,
Had perished at the oar!
And their last morsel now is spread, —
A single cake of Doura bread
Which each, in love, saves for the other,
Tho' a world's wealth could not buy another.

VI

The old man's hair was thin and white,
His filmy eye had lost its light,

But all the meaning of despair
Was in its fixed and icy glare.
His head was bent; upon his breast
His wrinkled hands were feebly pressed,
As if to help it to sustain
Its overwhelming load of pain.
He moaned not, wept not, but there came,
At times, a shudder through his frame.
In virgin beauty, — breathing love
As if commissioned from above
To banish sin and wretchedness,
She held him in her soft caress,
And in her form and face and mien,
The beauty in which Heaven is seen
To walk the earth, was visible.

VII

She took the cake of Doura bread,
And moistened it in Father Nile;
Then rising, with an angel's smile,
She held it to his lips and said,
"My father, eat!" — he moved not yet —

Those livid lips are firmly set;
And stiff and silent as the grave,
He sat and glared upon the wave
Where glimmering ghostlike through the sedge,
The pelican sleeps on the water's edge.
But the vulture flaps its wings and hark!
To the fell hyena's baleful bark, —
As they scoop off the sand, and feast on the dead
Who have just been laid in their shallow bed.

VIII

Lofty — misty — regular —
Dimly looming from afar —
Cloudlike but immovable
As if some wizard's sudden spell
Had split the air into masses, — rise,
Crushing the earth and filling the skies,
The pyramids! And through the silvery sand
Emerging, like the Genius of the land,
To guard the living and the dead, —
Immense, unchangeable, sublime;

Braving the desert and defying time,
Mute witness of the flight of countless years,
The guardian Sphynx majestically rears
Her everlasting head.
Now like a giant slumbering in his might,
The Victor city proudly heaves in sight,
With mosque and palace blending with the night,
In solemn grandeur spread.
Upsprung the maid and youth together,
In fixed amaze — uncertain whether
They saw or dreamed — for in their dreams,
As they slept to the music of Narea's streams,
The self-same shapes, that soar aloft
Before them now, had haunted them oft,
Like visions of an older sphere,
Glimpses of the things that were
In other worlds — but viewless here.
Statue-like the gazers stood,
With eye, and lips, and attitude
Expectant.
Onward still they glide
Steadily with wind and tide.

Nearer — nearer — nearer yet —
And castle, mosque, and minaret,
And the fiercely frowning citadel,
That hangs like a hill over Joseph's well,
Pyramid, Sphynx, and the city's walls,
The Santon's tomb and the Emir's halls,
The gate and the olive avenue, —
Bathed in the liquid light that falls
From the clear sky, — are gleaming full in view.
And when the silence of surprise was o'er,
And thought could find a vent in speech,
Their eyes in wonder met, and each
Exclaimed, "I 've seen these things before!"

IX

"Amina! Cyril!" — had they heard
Aright? — All trembling at the sound,
They started from their trance, and found
Their sire erect — his hoary beard
Streams in the wind — the majesty
Of age surrounds him — in his eye
There gleams a purpose firm and high.

"Amina! Cyril!" — they replied
Only by leaping to his side,
And steadying the form that shook
Like a strong but tempest-tortured oak.
"My son — my son," thus Murgar spoke,
With outstretched finger pointing where
The spires of Cairo pierced the air —
"Behold thy native city! — there! —"
A thousand memories of the past,
A thousand thoughts came thick and fast
Upon him, — silently he bowed
His swaying head, then wept aloud,
And leaned dejected 'gainst the mast.
'T was but an instant that the storm
Of thought subdued that noble form.
Gathering his strength, he cast away
Despair. "It seems but yesterday,"
He said, and something like a smile
Crept sadly o'er his face the while, —
"But yesterday, that in the joy
And flower of youth — a laughing boy —
I climbed the hills of Greece and thought,

As every breeze new blessing brought,
If life so merrily began,
What rapture must await the man.
I see my father take my hand —
Our footsteps printed on the strand —
The boat that cuts the yellow sand,
  The vessel in the distance heaving —
And now upon her deck we stand,
  Her sails are up and we are leaving
Fair Corinth for a foreign land.
Till night I gazed on hill and plain,
  Our bark was swift, the wind was fair;
When morning came I looked in vain,
  For naught was left but sea and air.

My son, it seems but yesterday
Our gallant ship at anchor lay
Beneath these walls, and Cairo gave
Thy sire a home, and mine a grave : —
I see his last fond look — I hear
His last charge whispered in my ear —
His last appeal to Heaven to bless

The child so frail and fatherless.
It seems but yesterday, my boy,
Thy mother angel visited
My soul, and turned despair to joy,
Her eyes such radiant solace shed,
That night and desolation fled,
And borrowing beauty from those eyes,
The earth became a paradise.
Love and wealth and virtue crowned us,
Four noble striplings bloomed around us,
And thou a tender, timid thing,
Wert budding gaily as the spring.
Life was one long, unbroken feast,
Moving to music —
. . . Until . . . in the East
The Koran has triumphed, the scimitar 's gleaming,
Damascus has fallen, her best blood is streaming,
The barb of the desert is snorting and prancing,
'Allah il Allah ! ' the Moslem 's advancing —
Unwearied with conquest, unsated with slaughter,
Their galleys are launched — they are crossing
the water.

They land and they conquer — the fire-brand
flashes,
The wisdom of ages is burning to ashes.
I knew my boys were bold and true,
I knew they loathed the Paynim crew,
I knew they burned with Christian zeal
To shield our altars from the heel
Of thrice accursed Amrou.
One morn for battle all arrayed,
With glittering helm and sharpened blade . . .
My child, it was a gallant sight,
But oh, the horror of the night!
The crescent triumphed — Cairo fled —
My sons, my noble boys, were dead.
With shivered sword and gaping shield,
I hurried from that hopeless field,
One arm supported thee — the other
Upheld thy pallid, speechless mother.
We gained the crimsoned river's side,
And by the waning moon espied
A shallop to a palm tree tied,
Hoisted the sail, then seized the oar,

And darted from the fatal shore . . .
To land in Carnac! . . .
Flowerlike shrinking
Beneath affliction's fell simoom,
I watched thy mother daily sinking,
Gently gliding to the tomb.
But ere her grave was green, — like a knell
Came the battle-cry of the 'Sword of Hell.'
At dead of night I woke to hear
The yell of hate and the scream of fear,
For Caled himself was rushing down
Like a mountain torrent on the town.
I caught thee sleeping to my breast,
Through friend and foe I madly pressed
And flew at headlong speed
Along the sands — I know not where, —
Till a home I found in Narea."

x

The old man paused — his fingers ran
Along his brow, as if he sought
To join the scattered threads of thought

Then, starting, thus again began : —
" Twelve years ago one stormy day
An Alme sought my door to pray
For food and shelter ; — at her side,
Weeping, breathless, terrified,
Fair as the earliest flowers of spring,
An infant girl was tottering.
From every hill fierce clouds were scowling,
In every gorge the wind was howling,
And fire and thunder swept the sky,
And muttering drops fell heavily.

I sheltered them — and on my breast
Received the trembling infant guest.
The clear blood in her tender cheek,
Name — accent — all proclaimed the Greek.
But when my wandering finger drew
An *ivory* crucifix to view,
Concealed beneath her scanty vest,
I fondly vowed that from my heart
That homeless dove should never part,
But there forever make her nest.

'She 's mine!' the gipsy sternly cried: —
I showed an emerald ring,
The only relic of my pride,
But fit to deck a king:
'Oh, gipsy, gipsy, look on this!'
'She 's yours!' the struggle soon was o'er. —
She gave the child one tearful kiss,
And vanished smiling thro' the door.

Then loneliness did turn and flee
Before the fresh-lit torch of joy,
And thus a daughter came to me,
To cheer me with her lightsome glee —
A sister-playmate to my boy.
'T was sweet to watch them, year by year,
Grow ever dearer and more dear,
As likeness and communion wove
A tie as strong as natural love;
As brother and sister, — with the name
And thought, the actual feeling came."
He paused, and for an instant gasped

For breath — then to his bosom clasped
The maid. 'Amina, let me call
Thee still my child, for mine thou art,
Mine only — mine — by love, by all
The sacred birthright of the heart.
But ere I die, — it must be told:
I 'm not thy sire, whate'er I seem, —
Thy infant lips could but unfold
Thy name, and some dim nameless dream.
Who gave thee birth — I know not: God
Gave thee to me."
Amina stood
Like some celestial spirit hurled
Astounded from the other world;
Pale as the lily of the field
As Murgar's echoing words revealed
The secret that oft scared her sleep
Away and bade her wake and weep.
Unconsciously her hand had sought
The ivory crucifix, — and now
With parted lips and earnest brow
She gazed on it, as if it brought

A world of dim and dizzy thought,
Where memory's pale and glow-worm light
Was vainly struggling with the night.

" Alas, my child ! and am I doomed
To leave thee," the old man resumed, —
" Just as thy beauty's blooming bud
Expands to full-grown womanhood,
And the young graces most require
The guardian presence of a sire ?
My son ! — by her who bore thee swear, —
By her whose spirit watches here, —
By all the reverence you bear
An aged father's dying prayer,
That man nor fiend shall e'er divide
This orphan virgin from thy side ! "

He paused : — inspired by faith and love
He lifts his streaming eyes above —
Upon each head a hand he lays,
And inwardly the old man prays.
But o'er his fast declining eye

The film of death falls rapidly :
Howe'er the father's heart may bless,
His blanching lips are motionless,
His changing cheek grows ashy pale,
His nerveless limbs begin to fail,
Half clinging to Amina's neck,
He sinks down slowly on the deck.

XI

On glides the boat : upon the right
The city rises calm and bright.
No shriek — no loud lament betrays
The presence of the fiend that preys
Within her walls — but a muffled hum
Like the charnel roll of a funeral drum,
Speaks fearfully amid the night
  Of universal woe,
And troops of figures swathed in white
  Are flitting to and fro.

Swiftly to the curving shore
Young Cyril urged the boat, and bore

The dying man, with tenderest care,
To the shade of a giant sycamore
That was growing grandly there.
Amina followed and received
Upon her breast that heavenly load,
Her foster-father's head.
Still as a star — and if she grieved
No tear in crystal anguish flowed
To tell how sadly bled
Her loving heart: but she kept her watch
Like a seraph lingering to catch
The parting soul, ere with arching wing,
She sped to Heav'n with the offering.
Along the city's southern wall
A form is gliding, thin and tall,
Muffled close in cloak and hood:
With noiseless step it came and stood
Amongst them.
"Queen of Mercy, aid
Thy servant!" Murgar feebly said.
"Thy prayer is heard!" the stranger cried
With a joyous smile, and knelt beside

The dying man, and backward threw
His sable cowl and gave to view
A sweet and venerable face,
Where every spiritual grace
Had grown, from youth to age increased:
"Thou art a Christian — I a priest!"
He said: and with a gesture waved
The rest away. "Oh, I am saved!"
The old man sobbed, and as he spoke,
His face so pale and cheerless woke
In morning light, as if a ray
From Heav'n was glistening where he lay.
"Depart in peace!" — the oil was poured,
The sacred rites administered.

"My children, there are other bands
As dear — as pure, —" he joined their hands
In his, — "What you have been before
You cannot be: — henceforth be more!"

His voice in hollow murmurs dies,
But still he blessed them with his eyes.

And now, all thoughts of earth are gone,
His undivided soul is on
The skies — the majesty of faith
Has awed the grisly frown of death.
Life's earthly agony is past —
As if in quiet sleep, he breathed his last.

The blessed stranger rose and led
The maiden to an humble shed
  By famine's beak untenanted.
Then softly through the narrow door,
With Cyril's help, the corpse he bore
  And placed a wax-light at its head.
"My children, God himself will be
The father he has ta'en from ye,
I must depart, but I return.
Before that light has ceased to burn,
Around us many may require
The blessing that I brought your sire.
Farewell! — nor let your grief decline
This loaf — this flask of Scian wine."

He blessed them tenderly and went
Upon his mission, Heaven sent.

As mournfully the taper's light
Is mingling with the wearing night,
In death's immortal beauty lay
The father, — something more than clay
  Was lingering there
As the taper cast a flickering streak
Along his brow, and kissed his cheek,
  And lit his silvery hair.

The night wore on. Untasted stood,
Unseen, — unsought, — the generous food.
No tear was in Amina's eye —
No stifled moan, no bursting sigh
The pang of filial grief confessed,
But a fearful calm was in her breast.
Mute as the corpse at which she gazed,
As pale, as fixed, — her eye was glazed,
Her lips were set, — her hands were clenched,
And life itself seemed crushed or quenched.

Not for himself, nor for the dead
Did Cyril tremble now; the maid
Absorbed all other thoughts — appalled
He staggered to her side — he called
Her name — she heard him not — again —
Again he called — Alas, in vain!
He could not break that icy spell,
  Or warm the marble of her brow.
  As falls the drifted wreath of snow
Before the wind that piled it, fell
The maid, — but the deathlike trance is o'er,
And the red blood mounts to her lips once more,
Her veins are thrilling, her young brow burns,
As the fevered tide of life returns,
And her head is swaying in restless motion,
Her arms are tossed like foam on the ocean,
  And wildly and strangely she speaks;
But she hears not the frequent and heartbroken
      call
Of the youth, and she feels not his tears as
      they fall,
  In bitterness, on her cheeks.

Canto II

I

LET wearied hind and fainting slave
Their solace find in sleep,
That blessed foretaste of the grave,
Where they may cease to weep,
But the soldier sleeps beneath his shield,
Or staggering from the battle-field,
Rests where the beaker flashes bright,
Where star-eyed beauty scatters light,
And mirth and music make the night
A sweeter solace yield.
Then cleanse the hand,
And sheathe the brand,
And dip the shafts of sorrow
In light divine
From the blood of the vine,
For our own may flow to-morrow!

II

The slumbering lovelorn swain may deem
His darling hears his sighs,
And win the rapture from a dream
That morning still denies,
But the warrior wakes to ward or feel
The actual point of tested steel:
No filmy fancy sketch for him,
But the wine that beads the goblet's brim,
And the lustrous eyes that sink or swim,
In dazzling light must reel!
Then heap the board,
And let the sword
A wreath from Venus borrow,
For the fearless eye,
Now flashing high,
May be dim enough to-morrow!

III

We 'll feast until the Midas sun
Has turned the earth to gold,

For many, ere his race be run,
Must stiffen pale and cold.
Then shake the flaming cup on high
And gild the moments as they fly!
And while the foaming nectar streams,
And beauty o'er the goblet gleams,
What care we whether morning beams
Bring death or victory.
Then sheathe the brand
And, hand in hand,
Away with fear and sorrow!
For many an arm,
Now lithe and warm,
May be cold enough to-morrow.

IV

Mixed with the reckless lay, the cymbal's clang
Arose, — the palace trembled as they sang.
The table groaned beneath its genial load,
The viand smoked, the creaming sherbet flowed;
In generous heaps the honeyed date was piled,
The grape was gleaming and the citron smiled,

And every clime had brought an offering there
To whet the palate, or to scent the air.
Around the board a swart and martial throng
Pursued the banquet or resumed the song:
Here, leaning on his hand, a stripling lay,
With soul turned inward wandering far away,
In whom, all save the eagle eye, appears
Less used to drawing blood than woman's tears;
And there a veteran band, with many a scar
From lance, shaft, ataghan or scimitar,
Smile on their half-dried swords and fondly hug
The oft-drained goblet with a quiet shrug.
The fountain sparkles in its marble bed,
A thousand waxen tapers softly shed
A mellow radiance, that returns again
From glancing column and the tinted pane;
While breathing o'er the scene the Ambar throws
A fragrance sweeter than the attar rose.
At times a low and quivering cadence fell
Upon the ear, in soft and measured swell,

As, glancing through the alcove's idle screen,
Like roses peeping through their veils of green,
The Asheh fluttering o'er the braided hair,
Each dark eye flashing from its purpled lair,
With lids that from the witching Kohol steal
The gloss of passions they have ceased to feel,
The heaving bosom trained with fearful art
To counterfeit the action of the heart,
Move the light Almé, sighing as they pour
The tide of song and wave the struck tambour.

v

Thus rose the battle song and banquet shout
Within the hall, tho' famine raged without.
But *he* — at whose command the princely board
Was heaped, — Amin, their leader and their lord —
How fearfully amid that revelry
Shone the cold glitter of his aching eye.
Stern was his face and withered by the grief
That madly scorns humility's relief,
And masked by impious pride, will rather bear

The fires of Hell than quench them by a tear.
But yet upon that dark and corded brow,
And lowering glance, so cold and ruthless now,
Lurked something like a relic of the past,
Ere smiling innocence had felt the blast
Of sin and sorrow, — something that might still
Arrest the angel as he stooped to kill.
White was his hand and delicate his face,
Moulded each sinewy limb in manly grace,
And though regret, remorse, or chill despair,
Had grained a thick frost in his raven hair,
Not one firm muscle quivered 'neath the storm.
Agile his step and vigorous his form,
And bold and staunch and subtle were the foe
Who 'scapes with life when Amin aims the blow.
Unseen by him, the Alme wheeled along
In fairy circles stepping to her song;
Unheard by him, the martial chorus pealed,
Half drowned by clashing cup and clanging shield.
Stern as a rock whose sable front divides

The crystal current clinging to its sides,
And scowls upon the wavelets as they run
Babbling of life and bursting in the sun, —
He sat apart and frowning clutched the bowl,
As if the wine were balsam to his soul.

VI

'T is midnight: Amin sternly waved his hand:
As if by magic at that mute command,
The revellers staggering, bowed and disappeared,
The lamps were quenched, the dripping tables cleared,
Slave, soldier, Alme, like a dream had flown,
The feast was o'er and Amin sat alone.
Alone? — alone with memory that gave, —
Rekindling as it brooded o'er the grave, —
The dead in beauty back, and filled the hall
With shapes forever lackeying its call.
Alone with all the inner world of thought
Around him; images that came unsought
And glared and gibbered as they overcast

Some glorious vision shining from the past.
Alone, confronted with remembered life,
Love, hate, guilt, innocence, woe, peace, and strife,
And one small hope, lone, desperate and dim,
Pale as a planet on the storm-cloud's rim.

VII

How deeply, deadly still! — the voiceless air
Sighs with the secrets it would fain declare.
Here, night by night, for many an awful week
Had Amin listened to the mother's shriek —
The mourner's howl — the santon's maniac shout —
And all the sounds of anguish from without.
Listened and laughed to check th' unbidden throe
Of Heaven-born sympathy for human woe.
But now, this dead, deceitful silence, worse
Than grief's worst voice, clung 'round him like a curse.
It seemed as if the city held her breath

To clasp the white veil of her bridegroom,
Death,
And hushed the bootless curse and fruitless cry,
Wooing her fate in stifled agony.

VIII

"Tell me, pale victims, whither ye have
borne
My jewel, and my granary shall yawn,
Pouring like sand along this arid plain
Those golden pyramids of hoarded grain
For which ye beg, rave, bleed and die in vain.
Bring but her ashes — ye shall cease to feel
Lean famine's throttle, or th' avenging steel.
Sole legacy of love as pure and true
As mortal e'er conceived or seraph knew,
Alas, so fair, so cherub-like, so young,
Lost as my name first glided from thy tongue;
Forever, — ever, — swept from my embrace,
Thou and the mother living in thy face! —
O God! if I but knew that thou wert dead,
And knew the stone that pillows thy cold head,

That I might lay thee by thy mother's side
And kiss thy martyr ashes ere I died! —
Sickening, I tremble lest thy real doom
Be worse than all the terror of the tomb.
Perchance a thing from which thy sire would shrink;
A ruined creature shivering on the brink
Of open infamy — perchance as stale
In sin as Hell could wish or Heav'n bewail.
Torn from the burning love that gave thee birth
And cast a helpless wanderer on the earth,
Decoyed, caressed, deluded and defiled,
A nameless outcast — oh, my child, my child!"

IX

He could not weep — too long his haughty eye
Had scorned a tear, and now the fount was dry.
Bent was his head, as if descending fate
Already crushed him with its leaden weight.

A moment — and he reeled beneath the shock
Like a strong galley staggering from a rock.
'T was but a moment: — starting in his chair,
As the stung lion kindles in his lair,
Forward he sprang and glared around in wrath,
Heedless if man or serpent cross his path,
Equal to aught: — his eye is all on fire,
His teeth set fast, his lip alive with ire,
Fast o'er the floor with clanging heel he flies,
And shakes his clenched hand madly as he cries, —
"Perish, ye nerveless relics of a race
Foredoomed by God to bondage and disgrace,
Your misery moves *him* not — shall I relent,
Unbarb the arrow that his justice sent?
Have ye not wronged me more — ye cannot dim
His life and light or quench a hope in him.
Shall I then pity when he shuts his ear
And ape his mercy when he will not spare?
Have ye not robbed me of my child — can all
That crowned your fields or decks your Capitol,

Your mystic river and your emerald mines,
Your mummy palaces and godless shrines,
Your futile talismans and fabled charms,
Your dusky Nubians with their olive arms,
Can all of Egypt's living — all her dead —
Repay me for one hair upon her head?
No! — though a thousand yellow harvests lie
Kissing the high roof of my granary,
Ye shall not touch an atom tho' ye kneel
With gold and prayers or claim with lifted steel.
Here will I stand with plenty in the bowl,
A teeming table, though a barren soul,
Feast as your death gasp mingles with our laugh,
And with a jest, write Egypt's epitaph."

x

He turned: — a figure wrapped in cloak and hood,
Still as a midnight ghost, before him stood.
"Whence comest thou, brother?" —

" From the dead, to claim
The mercy thy revenge denied to them.
O Amin, brother, by the womb that gave
Our souls this kindred flesh, relent and save
The few that still survive Heaven's stern
decree,
God meant his curse to be relieved by thee.
Unlock thy granary, unbind its store,
Send baffled famine vanquished from thy door.
Then will a grateful nation kiss thy hand,
Arm at thy wish and die at thy command;
Then will the mother lift her languid head
And live to bless thee for the saving bread."

XI

" Armandes, cease this mummery: canst *thou*
Suppose these girlish things affect me now? —
What! — when the o'erburthened heart begins
to break
'Neath its own sorrows can it learn to ache
For others? — Tell me, brother, has despair
A tear to proffer or a sigh to share?

The time has passed when it was sweet to bless,
And sweet to earn the blessing of distress,
When in a beggar's grateful eye there shone
A light that once — once — once? — aye, all is gone!
What care I now for benison or curse,
For all the mothers in the universe,
For all the dulcet babes that e'er were born
To whine at night or whimper in the morn?
Ha! — let them starve in silence. Here I stand
An exile with his fortune in his brand,
Beset by fate, by every tempest tossed,
My wife, my child, my home, my country lost,
From every hope, from every blessing hurled,
My mission is to scourge, not spare the world."

XII

"Thy mission, Amin? — ever thus will pride
Hell's livery wear when Heaven's is cast aside.
I knew the tyrant, when he missed thy life,
Had deeper vengeance, when thy martyred wife

Received the wound — but oh, I little knew
That Cleon's meshes slaved thy spirit too."
It seemed as if a peal of thunder came
From Amin's soul at that accursed name, —
"Hush! by the living God, we both adore,
Forget that damned name, nor tempt me more!
Away! By Heav'n, but that thou lovest me well,
But that my memory begins to tell
Of Cyprus, and the merry days that gave
Light to the shore and beauty to the wave,
Not e'en thy reverend mien and priestly hood,
Thy first-born privilege, thy brother's blood,
Could shield thy heartless malice. Leave me!"

"Strike!
Our souls were once, — our nerves are still alike.
I rocked thy cradle, boy, — I made thee talk,
Braced thy weak back and taught thy feet to walk;
I led thee forth with wondering eye to scan
The face of nature and thy fellow-man,
I held thee to the stars, and night by night

Trained thy young lips to praise the God of
light.
Would'st have me fear thee?"
"I have changed since then."
"I know thou hast and thou shalt change again.
Stained as thou art, there 's faith within thee yet,
The sun that cloudless rose may cloudless set.
Nay, frown and chafe and madden if thou wilt
And glue thy fingers to thy dagger's hilt, —
Have I not left my country and my shrine,
Plighted my soul before its God for thine,
And shall I, childlike, falter in my task
Because my brother threatens in a mask?
Behold and hear me! — at thy feet I kneel
For starving Cairo — "
Turning on his heel
Proudly and sternly Amin stalked away, —
"Let God have mercy, brother, — I am clay."

XIII

Mournfully the tearful cypress weaves
Its arms around an ivory urn,

And half enfolds it in its drooping leaves.
Around it in a circle burn
Ten waxen tapers set in gold that shed
The clear calm light of innocence
Over this beauteous mansion of the dead.
From thurifers, perpetually fed
With myrrh and kindled frankincense,
Soft wreaths of fragrance are ascending
Like morning vapours with the soft light blending.
The spot is lovely, beautiful and strange;
So still that you may hear the beating of the heart;
Within its solitude you stand apart
From all this spinning world of change —
Forgotten there.
So sacred is it that the dead seem near,
And the excited sense may hear
Unearthly music in the solitary air,
And see the momentary gleam of filmy wings.
It is a spot for contemplation meant,
Full of quaint signs and thought-compelling things,

But over all that *Urn* is prominent,
Though half enveloped in its leafy screen;
And there are letters carved on it that frame
The sweet and liquid name
"IRENE."

Hush! there is one who came
Silently through that stately line
Of ebon columns stealing,
And spectre-like is kneeling
At the black marble shrine.
He kneels in silence, not in prayer, but sorrow,
Like one for whom there's nothing in the morrow.
But now his eye, at first so icy stern,
Is melting as he gazes at the urn.
And still he gazes, till his face that late
Breathed such determined scorn,
Such proud contempt of fate,
Is placid as a sleeping child's illumined by the morn;
For memory from the past came, like the dove,

With the green branch of everlasting love.
The very gentleness of youth came back
And glittered in his eye,
Fresh as when erst he trod the track
Of angel-guarded infancy.
Yes, in his bright, transparent brow,
Transfigured now by memory,
The unclouded lustre of his soul was seen,
The reflex of what Amin once had been
And might be now!
A nature gentle, generous, and high,
A noble heart as pure and mild
As any that e'er wept or smiled
In self-forgetful sympathy.
The loss of all he loved had driven
Deep in his soul the iron of despair,
And he had cried "Farewell to Heaven!"
And with increasing madness striven
Against the sweet humility of prayer,
Until his heart was broken, bruised, and bare.
But deem him not that dark and desperate thing,

Around whose barren heart each blessed spring
Of penitence and hope and ruth is dried
By the fierce breath of unrelenting pride
Exulting in its self-sufficiency.
For this he strove — but this he could not be;
For he had *once* loved God and there was still
A faith within him that he could not kill,
And many a friend in Heaven and earth preferred
A prayer for Amin and the prayer was heard.

XIV

"Alas, Irene! was I not blest
Deeply enough to see thy beauty's flower expand,
But I must pluck thee from thy stem with selfish hand
To burn and droop and wither on my breast!
Queen of some favored land,
By all beloved and by a king caressed
Might thou now be, had I not crept,
A serpent in thy sunny path, and swept
Away the velvet turf thy light foot pressed.

Oh, I have wronged thee by my love — have
sought
My happiness, for thine uncaring, brought
The dove to perish in the eagle's nest.
Irene! Irene! art thou near me?
Irene! Irene! canst thou hear me?
Stoop, angel, from thy Heavenly home to
teach me
The path by which thy Amin's soul may
reach thee."

Above the urn appears,
Moved by a hand invisible,
A crucifix, and Amin hears
A voice he knew full well,
Announcing in a prophet's tone —
"Behold thy path — the only one!"

XV

Say if his soul an instant bursts her bonds
And to the sound and to the sight responds,
If there is moisture in his swimming eye,

A pang, a hope, a tremor and a sigh;
And if he feels the manliness of prayer,
The cowardice and folly of despair,
The thin deceit, the self-avenging toil
Of pride resolved to perish with a smile,
And if he feels 't is nobler to look up
To Heav'n and calmly drain the bitter cup,
Manned for the worst, than howl around the bowl,
Till pride has stilled and Hell has steeled the soul?
Say is there one, that lists, whose sullen sneer
Would quench in Amin's eye the manly tear?

XVI

Behind the pale Mokittan hills, the morn,
Tinting the blended peaks, comes stealing on
As Amin leaves the shrine he loved so well
To climb the castle's spiring pinnacle.
Sheer down, full many a hundred feet below,
The dwindled city wakes to added woe;
Beyond the wall, the Nile and Desert wage

Their elemental war, from age to age
Enduring, symboling the ceaseless strife
'Twixt sin and innocence, 'twixt death and life.
Prophetic of the conflict first begun
And lost in Eden, but on Calvary won.
Alas! the river's but a silver thread,
The sands are narrowing his shrunken bed,
Who now shall bid him rise in might again,
Like the young war-horse toss his flying mane,
Heave back the desert, rend her yellow chain,
Pour his rich arteries in every vein
And scatter boundless plenty o'er the smiling plain?

XVII

Land of the mighty, province of the base,
Dark mouldering coffin of a wondrous race,
Whose books are pyramids, where in a glance
The present reads its insignificance.
What tho' the baffled half-despairing sage
Still seeks in vain the secrets of thy page?

These everlasting piles that smile on fate
And dare both man and time to mutilate
The record they are lifting to the sky,
Compose the noblest human history.
Authentic as the stars, their self-proved truth
Attests the majesty of Egypt's youth,
Still chaunting in an universal tongue
The grandest epic that was ever sung.

XVIII

'T was *there* the fruit of knowledge first began
To mitigate the curse it left on man ;
'T was *there* primeval science proudly sent
Her glance aloft and read the firmament ;
There first the mason from the quarry brought
The stolid rock and shaped it into thought,
And breathing beauty in the living mass,
Bade it endure to rival or surpass
Nature herself. 'T was *there* the o'erlearned priest
Explored the skies — and deified a beast !
Along that burning stream, that baking sod,

A Moses floated and a Joseph trod.
There flocked a thousand kings in scorn or awe
To break a sceptre or receive a law ;
'T was *there* the Greek in wondering reverence learned
The mental mastery of the power he spurned,
And stole the light that round her altars shone
To burn with softer lustre on his own.

XIX

O what are Persian spire, Byzantine dome,
The shafts of Baalbec and the pomp of Rome,
The true Promethean marbles that remain
To spur our genius and to spur in vain,
And all that bard or tourist can rehearse
In forced antithesis or flowing verse?
They seem as if their authors were at play, —
Things meant for time, frail flowers of yesterday
Beside the monuments here strewn around, —
A new creation on the *mother* ground, —

That, marked with epochs, through all time extend
And link the world's beginning with its end.

XX

Up leaps the sun with glory on his brow,
Bright as if all were happiness below;
But countless skulls are bleaching in his smile,
Black, yellow, gray or brown, a hideous pile,
Thick as the melons, which, in other years,
Decked the rich valley with their golden spheres;
Glancing in beauty through the velvet green
That coats the soft expanse of Bissateen.
No rose is blushing in the morning beam,
No lily nodding o'er her native stream,
But tombless bodies stretched in grim array,
Feed the warm beam in which they melt away.
Sad was the sight, but sadder far to see
The living writhing in their agony;
To mark those wretches staggering along,
Striving to drown their madness in a song,

Their eyes inflamed, their features wild with all
The demon glare of famine's cannibal : —
No longer rose the vain appeal for bread,
The rich are dying, and the poor are dead ;
'T is Famine's bow supplies the only feast,
Her every shaft provides one meal at least.
Hark to yon santon shrieking, as the death
He vowed on others sucks his thickening breath !
Hark to the last Muezzin's single cry, —
" The scythe is meant for all, and all must die ! "
No longer mourners howl at every door ;
Lament, attendance, burial are o'er,
The dead are welcome, 't is the only food
For half that decimated multitude.
Such is the soul-congealing pit of woe
That morning lights and Amin sees below.

XXI

He saw and shuddering touched the master key
That oped the huge gates of his granary,

Whose granite walls are rising gray and grim
Like some sea monster from the river's brim.
The key already trembles in his hand —
When hark! a voice —
"Lord Amin, thy command?"
Beside him stood the leader of his band,
Doffing his cap and bowing as he speaks.
No carpet warrior he, his iron cheeks
Are streaked with lines not harrowed there by thought,
Broad seams that sin and sorrow never wrought.
A thorough soldier of the genuine stamp,
Whose only music is a squadron's tramp,
His home the tent, his bride a faithful sword,
His life and soul, the birthright of his Lord.
Steel-true was Haldar — Amin knew it well: —
"Methinks thou 'rt something soon — hast aught to tell?"
"The desperate city arms herself again
To force the Granary —"
"And bleed in vain."

"Look, thou canst see them in the square
beneath,
Advancing as I speak — "
"To quicker death."

XXII

Goaded by hunger, maddened by despair,
With venomed shaft and flashing scimitar,
In wild disorder hurrying along,
On comes the countless, dark, and desperate
throng.
Worn as they were — the fixed resolve to sell
Each life or conquer, made them terrible;
For well they knew 't was better far to meet
Death in the field than famine in retreat,
Better to court the trenchant blade than flinch
To eke out life and perish inch by inch.
No wanton banner streaming in the morn,
No chiming tymbalon or twanging horn,
Announce their purpose and their march pro-
claim,
But swiftly, sternly, silently they came.

XXIII

Dark grew the chieftain's brow and bright his eye —
The blood crept to his cheek, and haughtily
His pale lip curled — and from his countenance
Compassion vanished, as one rapid glance
Revealed the danger : — for, in battle nursed,
Impatient when it lowered, the fatal thirst
Of war possessed him, and he coveted
The strife in which his hero soul was bred.
Howe'er he wished to grant — he could not yield
One footstep when the foe was in the field,
Howe'er he wished to save — he could not spare
A frowning victim with his weapon bare.
"Now look ye, Haldar, by a sinner's hope
Of Heav'n, I swear, I meant this hour to ope
The granary and awhile defraud the tomb
Of yon mad rout that now provoke their doom.
I meant to scatter to the multitude

The freighted harvests that with toil and blood
We snatched from Cleon's galleys, and explore
The fertile ocean till it yielded more.
So far had pity moved me, when, thus sent,
By Heav'n they foil the mercy that I meant:
Since Heav'n has willed it thus, — well, be it so!
I cannot see a suppliant in a foe.
Ho! to your charger, — let me hear your horn,
Fresh blows the breeze, — there 's vigour in the morn."

XXIV

Soon rose the blast, — but see, along the stream
That strange, lone figure creeping — ye might deem
The pallid thing some Afrit tempted there,
Scenting the battle-field — her head is bare,
And o'er her shoulders the black tangled hair
Waves wildly: — following the sluggish Nile,
She wanders wearily; for many a mile
Across the burning desert had she sped,
With blistered foot and unprotected head,

Unblessed by water, unsustained by bread.
Tall was she and though more than forty years
Of wanton riot, sorrow, sin and tears
Had mowed her beauty down, yet in her mien
And step there still was something of the queen.
Some paltry ornaments in mockery hung
About her — and a faded shawl was flung
Across the withered neck that bade no more
A woman envy or a man adore.
At times she wept and muttered as she went,
And sobbing o'er the stream an instant bent, —
Then journeyed on and oft, with bitter sigh,
Chaunted some wild fantastic melody:
At times she stooped and with her feeble hand
Traced links of curious figures in the sand,
And mused awhile, then, shrinking in dismay,
Leaped to her feet and shuddering fled away.

XXV

She paused beneath a giant sycamore
And saw a taper glimmering through the door
Of a rude hut, — attracted to the spot,

She stealthily crept closer to the cot.
She saw an old man wrapped in slumber deep,
Profoundly still and smiling in his sleep:
She saw a helpless maiden stretched upon
A wretched pallet, with the morning sun
Touching her pale cheek with a golden gleam,
Who seemed to wrestle with some hideous dream,
For her head was swaying in restless motion,
And her white arms tossing like foam on the ocean.
But when she saw the loaf, the flask of wine,
She sprang upon them, muttering — "Ye are mine!"
One anxious glance she quickly cast around,
Flung back her hair and, crouching to the ground,
Fierce as a famished wolf, she drank and fed,
Unmindful of the dying or the dead.

[This woman is the gipsy who had sold Amina, when a child, to Murgar for the emerald ring, as related in the first Canto. The poet did not live to finish the third and final Canto, but the ending was to have been as follows: The gipsy had stolen Amina, the child of Amin,

well knowing her parentage, and hoping to gain a large reward by restoring her after a time to her father, but the temptation of Murgar's magnificent emerald ring overcame this intention.

Armandes, the priest, brother to Amin, revisits the hut and, finding there the gipsy whom he had met before elsewhere, makes her assist in reviving Amina while he is preparing Murgar for burial. Presently Cyril returns and joins them in these pious offices. The gipsy suddenly recognises Murgar and questions Cyril, who relates the story they had heard from Murgar while descending the river. The gipsy becomes much agitated and, being pressed by Armandes, reveals the secret that Amina was no other than the long-lost daughter of Amin.

Armandes, taking with him the gipsy, sets forth at once to find Amin. They arrive just in time to interpose, and prevent the conflict with the starving multitude. All is explained, the granaries are opened, the famine is ended and Amin is made happy by the recovery of his beloved daughter.

F. B. M.]

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